University of Alberta

Teachers Engaged in School Improvement: A Case Study

by

Michael Paul Diachuk

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in

partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Secondary Education

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 2006

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-494-13924-2
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-494-13924-2

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

This interpretive inquiry uses a case study design to examine the experiences of five elementary teachers as they engaged in a three year Albert Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) project. The study was guided by three research questions.

1. How do teachers view their own practice and situate their own professional identities when they are involved in school improvement initiatives?

2. What expectations did teachers have as they engaged in the school improvement process and were they realized in the course of their project?

3. What did teachers learn?

Seven major themes emerged from the interviews conducted with the participants: Urgency-Energy-Agency (Earl and Lee, 1998), Goal Focus and Leadership, Professional Development, Learning Community, Balance, Changes in Practice and Changes for Future AISI Projects. A minor theme was identified by two of the participants and spoke to the role of the AISI Coordinator for the division.

Teachers in the study detailed the complex nature of the role of teachers, the ongoing associated tensions and individual nature of each of their pathways in the school improvement project.

The findings in this study should provide insight for practitioners and researchers involved in school improvement initiatives.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have helped make this dissertation possible. First, I would like to thank my wife Bev and children Jillian and Michael whose unwavering support and encouragement kept me focused and moving forward to the end.

Special thanks to my brother Bill and sister-in-law Irene who provided a home away from home during my summer studies. To my sister Shirley and husband Orest, grateful thanks for your moral and physical support particularly when my car burst into flames on the journey in to university.

I would like to give special thanks to the teachers who participated in the study. Their dedication, commitment and courage have been an inspiration for me. I appreciated their openness, frankness and willingness to share their personal and professional experiences.

I would particularly like to thank Dr. George Richardson for his patience, support and encouragement. His suggestions and direction assisted me in finding my own personal pathway through the doctoral journey.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Problem and Research Question 1
Introduction: Living With/in Change 1
The Research Context: The AISI Projects 6
Research questions 11
Significance of the Study 11

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework and Review of Literature 14
Introduction 14
Interpretive Inquiry 14
Review of the Literature on School Improvement and Change 18
AISI and School Improvement 18
The Experience of Change 25
Change and Schools 27
Change Theories 28
The Complex Educational Environment 31
The Complexity of the Teaching Role 34
Conclusion 36

Chapter 3: Research Methodology 38
Introduction 38
Qualitative Research Framework 38
Interpretive Inquiry 39
Research Design 40
Selection of Research Site 42
Data Collection 43
Data Analysis 48
Role of the Researcher 49
Limitations 51
Delimitations 51
Significance of the Study 51
Ethical Issues 52
Conclusion 53

Chapter 4: The Participants, Their Context and AISI Project 55
Introduction 55
The Participants 55
Shirley 55
Bev 58
Jill 60
Bill 62
Leland 63
Conclusion 65
The Research Context 66
The School Staff 67

The Parent Community 69
The School Division 70
The AISI Project 71
Conclusion 76

Chapter 5: Themes and Analysis 78
Introduction 78
Emerging Themes and Analysis 78
Urgency-energy-Agency 80
Understanding AISI 88
Goal Focus and Leadership 91
Professional Development 102
Learning Community 109
Balance 115
Changes In Practice 119
Changes for Future AISI Projects 127
Minor Themes 128
Role of the AISI Coordinator 129
Conclusion 130

Chapter 6: Findings, Limitations, and Implications 132
Introduction 132
Research Questions 132
Conclusion 143
Limitations of the Study 143
Implications 144
The Researcher As Changed 148
Afterward 152

References 157

Chapter One: Problem and Research Question

Introduction: Living With/in Change

I began teaching in 1977 with no real understanding about the kinds, numbers and breadth of the changes I would experience as a teacher, school administrator and central office administrator in public education. Over the course of my career in education, change has become a constant and with it has come the challenge of dealing with the unsettling effects of change.

In my early years of teaching, two areas dominated the change efforts in the schools in which I taught. First, curriculum renewal seemed to be an ongoing activity, and my elementary teacher colleagues were put under the greatest strain given that they tended to teach most if not all the curriculum areas to their students. At the high school level, grade twelve courses began to look more and more like first year university courses, and grade nine courses started to look very much like high school courses. The impacts of these changes were frequently the subject of Friday afternoon "choir practice" held at the "local watering hole" where we would discuss the events of the week just past. The first hour of these sessions was usually reserved for venting with those present providing encouragement and moral support. As we listened and shared our stories, there was anger, disbelief and sometimes despair at the scope and speed of the curriculum changes we were being asked to implement. I often wondered how we managed to cope. Sadly, some visited the watering hole on a far too regular basis as a way of finding some peace and a means of coping away from their work.

The second area that dominated my teaching experience was the attention paid to improving teacher practice. Over time, teacher supervision practices moved from brief observations that produced final checklists of teaching competencies to more ambitious expectations that teacher evaluation would become an on-going series of formative discussions between teachers and supervisors. As a teacher, I was now expected to take ownership of my own professional learning and growth. While many of us viewed this change as an improvement over existing practices, in some ways it was also easier to have someone provide you with a checklist. This new level of responsibility added pressure to teachers already struggling to cope with the daily stresses of classroom teaching.

In the classroom, my role as a teacher also began to change. I was no longer expected to engage in direct instruction as the "sage on the stage" but rather act as a facilitator of learning as the "guide on the side." This required a number of new teaching strategies I did not have upon leaving university. As well, it meant developing an understanding of what a constructivist classroom should look like for the student and for me as a teacher. Luckily, I learned that I was fairly competent in adopting constructivist teaching practices, and for me the transition was easier than I thought. For others, it was not so.

Over the course of my career, the list of changes mandated in the name of school improvement is long. Open classrooms, whole language, social promotion, native education programs, inclusive education, portfolio evaluation, self-evaluation, student-led conferences, professional growth plans, and integration of technology are but a few of such efforts. As a teacher and administrator, I struggled to understand

and make sense of these changes as they related to my experiences and my teaching practice. With my peers, I did not understand or support each and every initiative as it was presented, and I frequently asked myself whose interests were really being served in the context of change described as "school improvement" by central office or Alberta Learning. If the initiatives did not ultimately improve student learning, then how could the initiatives be described as a school improvement initiative?

In some cases, our challenges to the initiatives we faced resulted in a modified or new initiative based on the needs of students and the school. However, in some instances, in spite of our resistance, change was dictated to us. Successful implementation rarely materialized in these instances. In this atmosphere of continual change, I continued to work in education, but many of my peers did not. Some chose early retirement and some left the profession. While it was disappointing to see colleagues leave, it was also understandable.

As I gained more experience as a teacher, I developed greater insight into the change process and began to think that given the opportunity I might be effective at handling issues like change and improvement of student learning. When the opportunity presented itself I applied for a principalship, and on May 6, 1986, I taught my last junior high band class just before noon. An Alberta Learning representative picked me up shortly thereafter and we drove to my new school. A half an hour later I chaired their staff meeting as their new principal. I had not seen the agenda prior to the meeting, nor did I know all of the issues and problems awaiting me upon my arrival. Somehow I survived that initial meeting and, from that point on, I recognized how much more difficult it was to initiate successfully school improvement ideas

while attempting to respond to the changes demanded by Alberta Learning, our Board of Education and parent community.

My experiences in the predominantly Métis elementary school were my first encounter in attempting to change teacher, parent and student attitudes towards school and school improvement. I would tell my staff, students and parent community, "Nobody flew over this community or this school and waved a 'stupid wand' over it. Every single one of us has the ability to succeed." Attempting to make changes in existing beliefs and practices was challenging and often very frustrating. Many individual conversations were held to challenge practices and beliefs that staff members had about each other, the students and the community. Tear-filled conversations that went on long after school were balanced with moments of accomplishment as students demonstrated personal and scholastic growth and improvements were made in the school. While efforts were made to engage the entire staff in the improvement process, for some, in the end, it was not what they had expected or wanted. Some staff moved on, but the commitment to stay the course remained.

In my next school, my experience as a school principal making a transition from a junior high to a middle school philosophy revealed similar patterns to those I had seen in my first school. While we had agreed as a staff to undertake the shift from a junior high to middle school philosophy, not all teachers embraced the change as wholeheartedly in the classroom as they did in the staff room. Some members of the staff were quick to accept the concept. Others nodded their heads, volunteered for committees, but continued with their old practices. When I observed this second

group in their classes and spoke to them afterwards, the responses were revealing. Teachers noted that they had always taught and run their classes their own way and could not see why they needed to change. One teacher informed me that perhaps I should worry about the younger teachers given her imminent retirement in two years. Another was contemplating leaving the profession after twenty-two years, as the change to a middle school philosophy from a junior high philosophy was an affront to who he was as a teacher and what he believed in. I had taught with this individual for many years and we were good friends. The conversation was difficult for both of us, but what was clear was that he really enjoyed working with children, and in the end he decided to stay and began to make an effort to work on middle school philosophy.

In my current role as an Assistant Director of Education I continue to experience the challenges and complexity of fostering change for the sake of improvement of student learning. I had come to understand the notion of school improvement as an expected and necessary component for teachers and school divisions in order to keep in step with and anticipate the changes and needs in society, new research on student learning needs and the heightened level of diversity of student and teacher needs. Teachers continue to be placed in a position where they must balance the past, present and future. Their past experiences as students and teachers have shaped their understanding of the role of the school and their teaching practice. In the present, they are forced to reflect on the future they must prepare their students for based on their past experiences and their understanding of the world around them. The future that they face and must prepare their students for appears to demand that they constantly re-invent themselves as teachers. In such a complex

environment, it is not surprising that many teachers are uneasy about change and school improvement initiatives.

The Research Context: The AISI Projects

Most recently, I have been involved in working closely with teachers and administrators in a division-wide school improvement effort as part of Alberta Learning's initiative for school improvement. The announcement by Alberta Learning in 1999 that the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) had been approved was greeted with great anticipation by our central office · school administration. These additional resources provided funding that would be used to target specific goals within our system that otherwise could not be addressed within our current budget. Because the funding was aimed specifically at classroom instruction, educationally, this program was of great potential benefit to our students. However, as our projects evolved, our teachers' comments and concerns highlighted the need to examine our AISI project more closely, and particularly the need to listen more sensitively to what teachers were saying about their experiences in the school-based initiatives that AISI funded.

My role in the AISI project provided the formal leadership from our division office to work with three teachers seconded to serve as lead teachers. My time with the lead teachers focused on creating a conceptual framework based on a program evaluation model where our lead teachers examined the various components of the math program and based upon teacher input established goals, strategies and indicators for the project. A key role I provided for the group was that of a critical friend. When the group began to feel they were drifting or unsure of the next step a

meeting was scheduled. The discussions that ensued often posed more questions than answers and served to refocus the lead teachers.

Our approach to our Division's first AISI project was probably no different than that taken by other school divisions. Teacher focus groups were used to identify student-learning needs by analyzing Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) scores and student work. Teachers identified resources to supplement those areas deemed inadequate. Goals with appropriate strategies and supports were developed. There was a feeling at the outset that staff had ownership of the goals as they identified them. However once we began the implementation of these strategies we began to truly understand and experience the complexity of change that we were involved in.

Teachers were experiencing growing numbers of behavioral and special needs students in their classes. In addition to our AISI initiatives, each of our schools already had their own list of goals it was working on. The Province had also continued with its agenda for renewing curriculum. Elementary teachers, in particular, were beginning to feel overwhelmed. Teachers described their change experiences in our schools as the pancake model of change. Initiatives were continuing to be piled one on top of the other with no end in sight. They asked, "When were we as central office staff going to realize that teachers could only handle so many pancakes or change initiatives? When would we be taking some initiatives off their plates before we added anymore on?" They were fed up with an unending stream of items that did not seem to be coming from a single menu. Staff needed to understand how the pieces they had fit together before their appetite for more improvement initiatives would return. Where was the coherence?

Our AISI project has been completed and after three years a number of concerns have emerged. The student improvement goals have not been achieved with any degree of predictability. One grade has stymied all efforts of our staff to explain their lack of success while other grades have exceeded all expectations. With staff, varied levels of change were observed. Some teachers seemed to have the capacity to change their practice easily. Others changed minor elements of their practice. A few had indicated that they had made changes, but there was a question if those changes had been made given the observations of our lead teachers. As well, some teachers had openly resisted the pressure to change their practice.

These observations about varying levels of teacher commitment to the AISI project are consistent with those made by Fullan (1991) when he notes that change is a highly personal experience and each and every teacher involved in the change process must have an opportunity to find his or her own pathway through the innovation or change. Hargreaves (1994) elaborates on the personal nature of change by adding that not only must teachers be involved in change, but their involvement must also provide for opportunities to enhance their abilities as social learners and develop shared meaning. As social learners, teachers have both a capacity to change as well as a desire to change (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves and Fullan's comments highlight the complexity and dilemma of teachers as critical agents of change with personal attributes and technical skills, and also as members of a school community. Teachers are caught between their desire to retain those elements of their practice that make a difference, the need to improve on those that will enhance their practice, and the challenge to make these changes possible.

A critical observation by Earl and Lee (1998) in the Manitoba School Improvement Project regarding the experiences of teachers is the pattern of "urgency-energy-agency-more energy." Fullan speaks to this pattern in his introduction to Earl and Lee's report and highlights the fragility of the nervous energy of teachers particularly at the onset of the improvement initiative and the potential for this optimism to quickly spiral down into cynicism (p. v.). Teachers have the capacity to recognize the needs that their students manifest in their classrooms, but their capacity to change their teaching practices given their circumstances and situation within their school is a critical element in the school improvement process.

Like Earl and Lee, we also observed the "urgency – energy – agency – more energy" patterns within our AISI project. Staff involved in lead roles within our system often began their involvement with a high degree of urgency and energy and just as frequently experienced disappointment and cynicism where little or no positive change or agency was realized. However, as a team they regrouped and returned to their schools with a renewed energy and commitment. The best efforts to model and practice successful school improvement strategies by central office staff and lead teachers resulted in a degree of positive change, but as Fullan (1999) notes in his description of complexity theory, positive change is not always predictable in a linear fashion. Our school improvement efforts have also highlighted the fact that many teachers feel that they are "between a rock and hard place" as they attempt to meet the student needs in their classrooms. They are caught between the commitment and moral purpose necessary to meet student needs and the unrelenting demands placed

on them continually to change and adapt their practice to meet newly defined educational goals.

While my role has changed over the years, the questions and issues have not. As teacher, principal and Assistant Director of Education, I have seen instances where change has been promoted for the sake of change and not for the sake of student learning. I have also seen initiatives developed by teachers, school administrators and central office administrators that have been sensitive to the needs of those involved as well as those that were totally oblivious to the needs of staff and students. What has been clear throughout all of these efforts is that without recognition of the critical role that teachers play in school improvement, efforts at changing existing practices have typically failed. On the other hand, where time has been taken to actively engage teachers in the improvement process the result has usually been enhanced student learning and a greater sense of empowerment on the part of teachers.

An additional observation about improvement that has influenced my role is that the old adage of "time stands still for no one" is an important one to keep in mind. Changes that have occurred outside of the school have influenced greatly what goes on in the school setting. There is a personal responsibility to recognize these changes and respond to them in a proactive manner as much as possible. We can let change happen to us or become actively engaged in determining our own roles and responsibilities as educators.

Research Question

In the context of the complex issues raised in and around the notion of school improvement, and particularly as they affected the school that will be the focus of this research, the research question that will guide this study is:

What are teachers' experiences of externally mandated school improvement programs? In addressing this question, I will frame my study around three sub questions:

1) *How did teachers view their own practice and situate their own professional identities when they were involved in school improvement initiatives?*
2) *What expectations did teachers have as they engaged in the school improvement process and were they realized in the course of their project?*
3) *What did teachers learn?*

Significance of the Study

Studying an AISI project can provide us with an opportunity to contribute to the existing body of research on educational change by examining the experiences of teachers involved in school improvement. The current reporting structure of AISI requires school divisions to provide quantitative and qualitative data on the achievement of the project goals. A new feature of the final reporting mechanism includes a section where successful practices or key learnings can be shared with other AISI stakeholders.

Fullan (2001) has noted that although we are gaining insight into the necessary conditions for school improvement and we have some ideas about what makes change successful and what successful schools look like, we need to

understand more about the experiences of teachers engaged in school improvement. Fullan (1999) and Harris (1999) refer to the record of these experiences of teachers as the "black box". As a metaphor for experience, we only hear of the catastrophes associated with the need for examining the records of the "black box", but, in fact, the records black boxes contain are available for all journeys, successful or not. To understand school improvement and change better, we must examine the records beyond the departure or implementation point and the arrival point or completion of the improvement project. Simply knowing what the initiative is and whether it worked is inadequate for understanding such a complex process. As such, it is critical for researchers to get inside the "black box" to examine the experiences of teachers in an improvement project given their fundamental role in the change process.

In addition, the study of an AISI project school provides an opportunity to contribute a uniquely Canadian perspective to the literature on school improvement. Wendell (2000) in his review of literature notes the paucity of Canadian research and broad based reform (p. 2). He identifies three projects that have provided insight and notes they all provide a secondary school focus. These are the Exemplary Schools Project (Gaskell et al., 1995), the Manitoba School Improvement Project (Early & Lee, 1998) and the Halton, Ontario Effective Schools Project 1989 – 95 (Stoll and Fink, 1996).

The intent of my research is to help develop insights into the experience of elementary school teachers engaged in the school improvement process. Such insights will add to the growing body of Canadian research on school improvement, and

deepen our understanding of the complexities of school improvement as it is played out at the classroom level.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

In the context of this research, I employ an interpretive inquiry approach. In addition to a discussion of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of my research, I review research dealing with the role of the teacher in school improvement. As well, I examine the current Alberta Initiative for School Improvement model within the context of the complex conditions that affect the role and identity of teachers as active participants in the school improvement process. The discussions in this chapter will highlight what research tells us about the degree of complexity and difficulty associated with understanding the "black box" of teacher experiences when they are involved in school improvement and how teachers situate themselves in this context and the need to further examine this process.

As I continue to examine my own conceptual framework and attempt to gain insight into the thoughts and actions of teachers within a school improvement project, my research speaks to the need for a process of inquiry that is more concerned with gaining insight as opposed to developing theory. The various perspectives of the teachers engaged in school improvement are unique within the contexts of their own lives, interpretations and efforts to establish their own professional narratives. As teachers engage in school improvement, they do so within the context as members of a school staff and community, and this engagement is relevant to the beliefs, values and goals the school and community holds for their children. Likewise my own experiences have been realized in a similar educational environment.

Interpretive Inquiry

My research utilized interpretive inquiry methodology. Central to the interpretive inquiry are three themes: working holistically to find meaning behind another's expressions, a play between the part and whole to construct meaning, and recognizing the role of language and how it enables and limits understandings of the interpreter (Ellis, 1998, pp. 15–16). I held conversations with teachers to understand their experiences and co-construct meaning of the experience of school change (Ellis, 1998).

As teachers share their experience in an interpretive inquiry, both the teacher and researcher experience a merging of horizons through "a dialogical encounter of questions and answer" (Smith, 1993, p. 137 as quoted by Ellis, 1998, p. 8). Gadamer's principle of "historical effect" argues that one is never free of one's experiences, prejudices or fore-structure. As a researcher, one can never free one's self from his history, tradition or past. "Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event" (Gadamer, 2002, p. 300). For the researcher, the challenge is be open and listen to the teachers make sense of their experiences through their fore-structures and allow oneself to be drawn into the conversation so as to feel, see and live the experience of the other.

These fore-structures are referred to by Gadamer as "horizons" that reflect our past, present and future. Within them are our experiences, traditions and history of the world as we know them. Within interpretive inquiry, both the researcher and teachers are changed through this process as they engage in conversations and the fusions of their horizons result in changes to the understandings of both parties. The

challenge for me as a researcher was to engage and give myself into the conversation, yet be aware as I leave the conversation, of the changes that have occurred in my own horizon. This movement is the movement of language itself with no fixed or final understanding. "There is not reality 'out there', no meaning or knowledge waiting to be disclosed to the mind's eye until the act of understanding brings it into being" (Ellis, 1998 p. 7). As Gadamer (2002) elaborates, there is no single reality to be realized by all. Both the researcher and teacher are changed in the process.

> All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language, which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's language.... Interpretation, like conversation, is a closed circle within the dialectic of question and answer. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 350).

Through the conversation with research participants, one begins to connect the part to the whole and the whole to the part in an effort to make meaning. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) have suggested that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed and mediated by tools and signs, founded in purposive activity, and develop historically as the socio-cultural level impacts psychological organization (p. 229). Given the reliance upon written and spoken language to interpret, develop and transmit knowledge (Gallagher, 1992), interpretive inquiry provides an appropriate but challenging methodology for examining education.

The hermeneutic circle serves as a metaphor to guide the researcher in the interpretive inquiry (Ellis, 1998). The circle consists of two arcs – the forward and the backward arc. Within the forward arc, the researcher enters the circle with openness, humility and concerned engagement and attempts to make sense of the participant, situation or data while drawing upon his or her own autobiography,

prejudices, fore-structure and relationship to the problem (Ellis, 1998). In the backward arc, the researcher endeavors to "see what was unseen", examine the data for contradictions and try various interpretive frameworks on the data (Ellis, 1998). It serves to illuminate as a result of the newly discovered, and refocus, narrow and move the research from where it has been. "If no surprises occur, we either do not yet 'see' what can be uncovered, or we have not yet approached the entity in a way that respects the way it can show itself" (Ellis, 1998, p. 23).

The series of forward and backward arcs can also be perceived as a series of unfolding loops or spirals, with the goal not to determine a final truth, but rather to gain a deeper insight into the question. As the researcher enters the spiral, the autobiography reflects the personal bias or horizon of the researcher. Through the merging of the horizons of the researcher and the study participants, with language as a medium, a new temporal interpretation is created and understandings developed (Ellis, 1998; Smith, 1993).

Within the context of school improvement, change for teachers involves learning about themselves and their pedagogy. As such, school improvement, change and learning are concerned with how humans create meaning and make sense of their lives in order for life to go on. Within school improvement, authors such as Fullan stress the moral purpose of public education and Smith reiterates this purpose.

> Pedagogically, the highest priority is in having children and young people gain precisely a sense of the human world as being a construction that can be entered and engaged creatively; to have a sense that received understanding can be interpreted or re-interpreted and that human responsibility is fulfilled in precisely a taking up of this task (Smith, 2000, p. 42).

Interpretive inquiry is an appropriate framework through which one can hear the multiple voices of teachers engaged in school improvement, and gain insight to the experiences and interpretations they have developed in their experience with an AISI project. It also provides me as the researcher an opportunity to re-examine my own fore-structure and develop new questions to pursue within this context.

Review of the Literature on School Improvement and Change

AISI and School Improvement

While interpretive inquiry provides a framework for the researcher, it also provides a framework for participants as they engage in school improvement endeavors. Ideally, as educators and stakeholders are invited into school improvement efforts, they enter a conversational relation to develop shared understandings (Carson, 1986). These discussions serve to place in the open and develop common understandings as to what the key questions and issues are (Carson, 1986, p. 81). As Carson (1986) quotes Gadamer (1975, p. 330), "in 'real conversations' the words have a maieutic quality – they become like midwives helping to bring forth thoughts and ideas not hitherto present." The ongoing interaction serves to define the question, and as Carson (1986) suggests, all questioning arises out of the "negativity of experience, that is, that things are not as we had assumed them to be" (p. 81) starts with an attempt to understand the question itself.

Within the context of school improvement, definitions by Lousi, Lagerweij, and Boogt (1994), Barth (1990), and Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994) all note that improvement from the status quo, particularly as it relates to student achievement, is a

continuing aspect of schooling. In the works noted above, the desire for improvement results from a sense that things are not as we had assumed them to be. This "negativity of experience" produces the understanding that a new reality or set of expectations will be created as a result.

The recent implementation of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) in the 2000 – 2001 school year is consistent with the understandings of school improvement noted above. Thus as its goal, AISI is intended,

> To improve student learning and performance by fostering initiatives which reflect the unique needs and circumstances within school jurisdictions (Alberta, 1999a, p.4).

AISI guidelines stress that projects should demonstrate collaboration and meaningful involvement of the school community, reflect insight from research and literature on school improvement, focus on professional development, recognize the need for "top down" and "bottom up" processes and establish measures appropriate to the nature of the improvement sought (Alberta, 1999a). Attention is also paid to the need for time as well as to the understanding that school improvement is not a "quick fix" activity (Alberta, 1999a, p. 5). Inherent within this process is the expectation that meaningful collaboration and involvement of the school community will result in "real conversations".

Alberta Learning has served as a facilitator for a number of activities to promote and support AISI projects. AISI conferences, support staff, website support, and ongoing information sessions have been made available. As a participant I attended the AISI conference in Edmonton, an information session in Bonnyville and

consulted with field staff as well as those at Alberta Learning with respect to our school division's project.

Terry Wendell, Student Improvement Branch Director, made several presentations across the Province identifying key assumptions and principles to guide the school improvement efforts. His AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) Workshop handout titled AISI: Making A Difference for Alberta Students (Wendell, 2001) highlighted the work of several noteworthy authors in the field of change and school improvement. Among those included were Fullan, Stoll, Fink, and Jacka. Three major themes were highlighted from these scholars' work on school improvement. First, that successful school improvement required change and improvement upon the ways teachers taught their students, second, the importance of having teachers organize themselves into learning communities and, finally, the need to sustain a focus on student learning outcomes (Fullan, 1999; Jacka, 1999). Research on school improvement by Little (1981) further reinforces the foci established by the AISI project. In her study of six schools, those schools that demonstrated school improvement had teachers engage in ongoing dialogue about teacher practice, encouraged and continued ongoing peer observations of teaching, planned and worked collaboratively, and enhanced their teaching practice by learning from each other (Little, 1981, pp. 12–13). Earl and Lee (1998) also reinforce the need for the ongoing external stimuli and support provided by AISI staff throughout the project.

Support for these themes in the AISI program is also evident in the final reporting process. AISI guidelines are structured to accept over-expenditures,

question significant reductions in the staff development budget and require a focus on measures for student improvement (McEwen and Sakyi, 2001).

The role of the teacher in AISI has also expanded to include a number of additional responsibilities. Teachers have become AISI Coordinators and Lead Teachers within their respective school settings. The AISI conferences have encouraged teachers to become presenters of their AISI projects. Presentations at the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement – Annual Provincial AISI Conference, November 1-2, 2001, highlighted the role of teacher as action researcher. Presentations by professors from University of Lethbridge (Townsend, 2001), University of Alberta (Parsons, 2001) and the Professional Development support of the Alberta Teachers Association (Skytt, 2001) made reference to the nature of action research and the supports available from the postsecondary level. In her presentation on action research, Skytt (2001) highlighted the need for teachers to focus on a pressing issue in their classroom or school, develop a research question, collect information, set goals, take action and analyze results to determine if the action has achieved the desired results. A central theme throughout the presentation was the need to collect data from multiple sources and develop measures appropriate to the intended outcome.

The recent implementation of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement provides us with a Canadian context to examine the various complexities of school improvement and experience teachers have of school improvement. Building on early research by Mathew Miles (1964, 1993) there exists a significant body of American research on school improvement that addresses successful schools

(Neumann and Wehlage, 1995), school districts (Bryk et al., 1998), and successful state initiatives (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The Manitoba School Improvement Project evaluated by Earl and Lee (1998) provides us with a Canadian example that has a significant degree of similarity to studies conducted in the United States as well as the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.

The Manitoba School Improvement Program (Earl and Lee, 1998) provided an opportunity for secondary schools across the Province of Manitoba to participate voluntarily in school improvement. A total of seven middle schools and fifteen senior high schools participated in the program. As part of the evaluation, teachers were required to evaluate themselves on the project goals, student learning, student engagement and the extent to which their schools established school improvement processes (p. iv).

Of the twenty-two schools, seventeen identified themselves as having made progress on all four dimensions. In the preface of Earl and Lee's (1998) final report on the Manitoba School Improvement Project, Fullan identifies three key findings. His summary notes that "success is not easy, but it is possible; success is not linear or static, and that the MSIP was a collective effort and not twenty-two isolated initiatives" (1998, p. iv-v). Fullan goes on to note "the most original finding is the urgency-energy-agency-more energy pattern of success" identified in the successful schools (1998, p. v) and highlights the sense of urgency and associated implications with school improvement.

> There is, latent or otherwise, among many teachers in secondary schools in Canada and elsewhere, a great sense of anxiety and urgency about the future of many students in their classrooms. They know and fear that the future of a large proportion of these students will be

> dismal unless something can be done to engage them in learning. It doesn't take much to tap into this nervous energy of concerned teachers, at least initially. But as Earl and Lee speculate, this potential energy is fragile. Without any opportunity to act on it, it can easily turn into despair and cynicism. (p. v)

What is evident in the report is that the supports provided by the Manitoba School Improvement Program personnel, were critical for inviting teachers to become involved in improving their teaching, as well as providing the support in times of anxiety and need, thus fueling the urgency-energy-agency-more energy cycle. Earl and Lee's findings also reveal that substantial change can occur at the high school in a four-year period, which challenges Fullan's (1982) earlier work that suggested six years as a realistic time frame for significant change at a high school level and three years at an elementary level.

Earl and Lee (1998) identify six dimensions necessary for school improvement in their distillation of the research literature as it related to the Manitoba School Improvement Project: Focus on student learning, engagement of the school community, connection to the world outside, ongoing inquiry and reflection, coherence and integration among school initiatives and internal capacity for change (p. 19). The underlying assumptions behind these dimensions reflect the research of Stoll and Fink (1996) in the Halton Effective Schools project where the school district attempted to make all of its schools more effective. The school-related factors are not fixed but rather they represent ways that change can occur in schools. Each dimension has changed substantially over the years. Expectations for knowledge and skills in schools has changed, understanding of learning has grown and vision for the future for our students has changed as well. What worked in 1965 will not work in

2000. By attending to these dimensions however, each represents an avenue and direction by which change can be realized.

The authors seem to suggest that, given the ongoing rapid change, it is impossible to stand still and if schools do not attempt to respond or improve with the changes then they fall behind or drop in effectiveness. Much as Fullan (1999) has indicated in his eight lessons of change in *Change Forces: The Sequel,* these dimensions interact and are strategies of change that taken independently will have little lasting or meaningful effect, but taken in concert with the others, can have the effect of making change occur in teachers and organizations.

The processes of change in AISI as well as in the Manitoba School Improvement Project highlight the need to focus on the individual as well as organizational need for support when making change. While creating professional learning communities and engaging the broader school community are generally recognized as axiomatic when it comes to change, there still exists a need to explore the individual nature of change experienced by teachers. To create learning communities and engage the broader community, the "meaningful conversations" must occur in order to develop a common understanding and shared goals. Time as a precious commodity is often unavailable for such activities (Hargreaves, 1994).

School improvement efforts have tended to place a priority on outcomes and improving student performance. The degree to which attention has been placed on the changing role of the teacher, additional responsibilities, and the individual nature of change has not been consistent as school improvement agents have often been more concerned with outcomes and controlling teacher behaviors (Carson, 1986;

Hargreaves, 1994). The Manitoba School Improvement Program has highlighted many of the attributes required for successful improvement and also highlighted the need to explore further the individual nature of change and change process. As Fullan (1998) has noted in the preface, the potential energy of teachers can dissipate quickly and result in despair and cynicism.

The Experience of Change

A significant issue that emerges in school improvement is the notion of change and how individuals and groups experience change. In this section I shall examine a number of models of change that reflect individual as well as social change.

Running counter to the sense of urgency to change is the undeniable force within each individual to create a world that is predictable and generally consistent (Evans, 1996). As well, our social behavior tends to reflect a level of persistence and continuity, which runs counter to the sense of urgency to change (Schon, 1971).

In his discussion of the meaning of change, Evans (1996) identifies two facets to human behavior – cognitive and emotional. The cognitive component is reflected in our understanding ("I see what you mean") while the emotional is reflected in attachment to people and ideas ("you mean so much to me" "this principle matters so deeply to me") (Evans, 1996, p. 28). The depth of our understandings and attachment ultimately affect our ability and desire to change.

Marris (1975) elaborates on this attachment, and makes the case for understanding that life depends on continuity and any change to this continuity is perceived as loss. His studies that combined psychological and sociological

perspectives examined the effects of bereavement in England to the impact of slum clearance projects in America and Africa. Marris (1986) suggests that the conservative impulse to resist change is natural, and whether change is planned or unplanned, welcome or un-welcomed, this resistance is natural and should be expected.

> The conservative impulse...is as necessary for survival as for adaptability; and indeed adaptability itself depends upon it. For the ability to learn from experience relies on the stability of the interpretations by which we predict the pattern of events (Marris, 1986, p. 6).

Schon (1971) expands this idea and suggests that this notion of conservatism is also a social phenomenon. Both the individual and social system move through these stages of developing understanding and predictability in order to maintain a sense of stability and predictability.

Evans (1996) and Marris (1975, 1986) suggest that our ability to make sense of new information, establish a need for change and develop a capacity to cope, depends upon our ability to make meaning and fit new experiences into a predictable and understandable reality. Those changes that one is unable to make meaning of are resisted and we succumb to the conservative impulse to make sense of life as we know it. This process recognizes the work by Piaget in how we assimilate and accommodate data, and construct meaning (as cited in Marris, 1975). Any change or innovation "cannot be assimilated unless its meaning is shared" (Marris, 1975, p. 121). Wellman and Lipton highlight the connection between individual and shared experience.

> Human beings are meaning-making organisms. Knowledge is socially constructed and individually integrated. We sift experience through

> personal and social filters, forming beliefs and ways of knowing. Individuals interact with information and with others to shape new understandings from our world and about our world (2004, p. xi).

Only when the larger group shares the understanding and meaning will it be accepted widely or sustained.

Change and Schools

Rosenholtz (1989) reinforces this notion with her findings that schools that demonstrated ongoing school improvement tended to be characterized with a high level of shared meaning among teachers and others. While there are variations on the overall list of descriptors for successful school improvement efforts, research by Louis et al. (1994), Barth (1990), Joyce (1991), Reynolds (1993), Proudfoot and Baker (1994), Renihan and Renihan (1994) and Lezotte and Jacoby (1990) all make reference to the need for collaboration and development of shared meaning as essential for successful change and school improvement.

As teachers become involved in the inevitable dialogue in school improvement and the urgency-energy-agency-more energy cycle, several conversations result. The rational argument for and against the suggested change, the development of shared meaning, and the process of change must be contextualized within a sense of loss that will be experienced in giving up old practices for new (Marris, 1975, 1986). In the simplest of terms it becomes a question of "Is the gain worth the pain?"

Further complicating the notion of loss and change is the double standard of change whereby we see the value of change by other people. Change we seek in others we perceive in positive terms associated with growth while change others seek

in us we tend to experience in negative terms associated with loss (Evans, 1996, p. 38). While everyone appears to embrace the notion of change, most tend to resist the notion of having to change.

Fullan is emphatic about how the disregard for this "phenomenology of change" – how the process of change is experienced - is at the heart of failure of most change initiatives (2001, p.8). Those who are involved in school improvement and intent upon making change must keep this critical understanding in mind.

Change Theories

Discussion of change to this point has not addressed the issue of depth of change that is often alluded to and associated with school improvement. Fullan (2001) identifies three levels of change required in successful school improvement or "reculturing" the school environment. The multidimensional nature of innovation typically requires a change in instructional resources, new or different teaching approaches or strategies, and finally an alteration of beliefs or pedagogical assumptions and theories related to the innovation (Fullan, 2001, p. 39). The innovation must demonstrate a positive difference before it is accepted.

Fritz (1999a) explored change from a structural perspective and, after examining the behaviors and patterns of change over a period of twenty years, developed a model for change. In examining change he noticed that "when change is not well motivated, people will indeed change their habits and behaviors for a while, but later, there is a predictable turnaround, and they abandon the change and revert to their previous behaviors"(Fritz, 1999b, p. 1). Fritz (1999b) noticed that behaviors either "oscillated" and returned to their initial starting point or "advanced" to the

desired goal. Individuals whose behavior oscillated were unsuccessful because of their "underlying structure" or "tension-resolution structure" (Fritz, 1999b, p.2).

As Marris (1986) has suggested, there is constant desire to achieve predictability, and the tension-resolution structure of the individual seeks to establish equilibrium to their tension. Fritz (1999b) posits that for successful change, "structural tension" is essential. This tension is created when individuals establish a goal or desired state and an objective view of reality. The resulting discrepancy produces the structural tension. As Fritz (1999b) points out, the most difficult step in this process is establishing a clearly defined goal as well as a thorough examination of reality. The success of the implementation of change then is contingent upon these two outcomes and result in the development of a personal vision. This process of creating a personal vision serves to motivate the individual to change and advance rather than manifest oscillating behavior.

Senge (2000) subscribes to this notion, however refers to the tension as a "creative tension" and associates the role of the leader or principal in this case to articulate the tension between what is and what the organization aspires for. What is critical for Senge (2000) in his vision setting process is that the goals must be well-defined and measurable. Senge (2000) also introduces the notion of "mental models" and notes that they serve to limit or expand our vision and what we are capable of observing. To change our ability to see a different reality, we are challenged to use a different mental model.

> This discipline of reflection and inquiry skills is focused around developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions – your own and those of others around you. Working with mental models can also help you more clearly and honestly define current reality. Since most

> mental models in education are often "undiscussable" and hidden from view, one of the critical acts for a learning school is to develop the capability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and discomfiting subjects (Senge, 2000, p. 7).

The models presented by Fritz (1999b) and Senge (2000) both have applications for individual as well as organizational change. Within both of these models, there is an inherent assumption that individuals and organizations have capacities for reflection. Mitchell, Sackney and Walker (1996) note that there are three levels of reflection: "a descriptive level where we reflect on our actions; an analytical level where we reflect on the reasons for our actions; and, a motivational level where we reflect on the ethical justifications for our actions" (Mitchell, Sackney and Walker, 1996, p. 57).

As Fritz (1999b) and Senge (2000) appear to suggest, it is not until we have reached the third level of reflection, that we reach the required level of motivation to advance and change. The ability of the individual to make full sense of one's context and reality determine one's ability to succeed in change and improvement.

Mitchell and Sackney (2000) describe a framework for change that bears similarity to that of Senge's and Fritz's. They suggest that too often change is approached from a "deficit model" where school improvement initiatives seem to suggest that teachers are inadequate or lacking in skills. Successful school improvement results when a "capacity building" approach is taken. There is recognition that the body of research and knowledge on student learning continues to grow and that it can only be expected that there will always be more to learn. Improvement efforts build upon existing skills and knowledge and teachers engage in

critical reflection and rebuild their "professional narrative" with changed skills and understandings (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000, p. 43).

Elmore elaborates on the relationship between the notions of school improvement and change that are often blurred in the literature. "Improvement is a function of learning to do the right thing in the setting where you work" (Elmore as quoted in Fullan, 2001, p. 270). While we all experience change individually, it is through the collective actions of individuals in the school setting that school improvements result. Where teachers are engaged in school improvement efforts they are also involved in change. It is through the collective discussions and individual reflections that change is challenged, viewed critically, and ultimately results in improvement in the school setting.

While the need for school improvement is generally viewed as axiomatic, the understanding of the individual nature of change, and thresholds and capacities for change continue to be sources of questioning and concern. As researchers have suggested, understanding the experience of change is critical for those engaged in the school improvement or the change process. Furthermore, there is a consistency in change theories that successful change occurs when the practices, beliefs, and values are uncovered and consistency between practices, beliefs and values is developed. As well, the discussion to this point has situated teachers within the context of multiple complex change processes when they are involved in school improvement efforts.

The Complex Educational Environment

Teachers and schools exist in a complex and changing environment. The students attending a teacher's classroom change every year. The number of students

per class, cultural makeup, gender balance, degree of heterogeneity in abilities, number of students from broken homes or blended families and variation in socioeconomic status are but a few descriptors of the various changes that teachers face at the beginning of each school year. In addition to changing students, changes within society also permeate the expectations that the public has of teachers, schools and achievement of students. Fullan (1991) describes this complexity by noting that efforts to make positive change or school improvement in one school are effective only in that school, and as efforts are made to make improvements to address the changes of the complex world that teachers face, it is not possible to simply do as others have done. Each school experiences its own phenomenology of change within the complexities of its own environment.

Within the broader social environment changing beliefs and times have created challenges for educators as they have attempted to contend with the changes in societal expectations while continuing to operate within outdated models and structures. Hargreaves (1994) characterizes this dilemma as the clashing of modernism and postmodernism. On the one hand is an increasingly postindustrial, postmodern world, characterized by accelerated change, intense compression of time and space, cultural diversity, technological complexity, national insecurity, and scientific uncertainty. On the other, is a modernistic, monolithic school system that continues to pursue deeply anachronistic purposes within opaque and inflexible structures (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 3).

The move from "content" to "process" is a significant characteristic and shift in education (Hargreaves, 1994). While there is a sense of including the multiple voices

and identities in education, there is also a greater focus on the "process" of learning where it is experienced as a process where learning and meaning is co-constructed by teacher and learner (Beck, 1997; Slattery, 1995). Slattery (1995) also advocates for recognition of the unique needs of the individual learner, developing critical thinking and learning skills and refusal to be limited to any particular contemporary theory.

Teachers have four key pressure points as they are caught in the confluence of changing perceptions and expectations for education.

1) The teacher's role expands to take on new problems and mandates - with little of the old role cast aside.
2) Innovations multiply as change accelerates - creating overload.
3) Collapse of moral certainties - old missions and purposes begin to crumble - no substitutes are readily available to replace them.
4) Methods and strategies teachers use, along with the knowledge base which justifies them, are constantly criticized - even among educators - as scientific certainties lose their credibility; often what teachers do seems patently and dangerously without foundation. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 4)

For teachers, the challenges of changing roles, expectations and methodology are extremely significant and challenging. Mitchell, Sackney and Walker (1996) describe this changing era as the postmodern world. "Postmodernity implies change. The postmodern world is fast, complex and uncertain" (Mitchell, Sackney and Walker, 1996, p. 54). This sense of relentless change poses unique difficulties and creates a high degree of uncertainty for teachers.

The perceptions society holds for education and teachers are also significant and an influential components for teachers. Hargreaves (2003) describes and characterizes these expectations this way:

> Teachers, more than anyone, are expected to build learning communities, create the knowledge society, and develop the capacities

> for innovation, flexibility and commitment to change that are essential to economic prosperity. At the same time, teachers are also expected to mitigate and counteract many of the immense problems that knowledge societies create such as excessive consumerism, loss of community, and widening gaps between rich and poor. Somehow, teachers must try to achieve these seemingly contradictory goals at the same time. This is their professional paradox (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 9).

Beyond the expectations set for teachers by society, Hargreaves goes on to describe the society that teachers work in as:

> a changing society in which information expands rapidly and circulates continuously around the globe; money and capital flow in a restless and relentless search for new investment opportunities; organizations continually restructure themselves; government policies undergo volatile shifts as electorates become more and more capricious; and multicultural migration keeps reconstituting the communities in which we live. Schools are not immune to all of this, and in a constantly changing world with expanding knowledge, shifting communities, and volatile seesaw politics in education, teachers in the knowledge society must therefore develop and be helped to develop capacities for taking risk, dealing with change, and undertaking inquiries when new demands and novel problems repeatedly confront them (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 27).

Teachers exist within a complex environment and are charged with significant responsibilities that have become increasingly difficult to meet given the changing social and political structures at the local, provincial, national and global levels.

The Complexity of the Teaching Role

Hargreaves (1994) examines teacher identity and differences that exists between teaching and other occupations. Teacher identity is a busy complex role that extends far beyond the challenging environment in the classroom. The complexity of the context that teachers are situated in is partially demonstrated by the notion of the classroom press. Huberman (1983) situates teachers in the classroom press that

exerts a daily influence on teachers' lives and the teaching process. Immediate and concrete decisions are required, totaling up to 200,000 interchanges per year; multiple activities must be carried on simultaneously; changing students and needs occur on an annual basis; and finally, the omnipresent recognition that establishing a personal relationship with each student is a precursor to academic learning (Huberman, 1983, pp. 482 – 483).

In his study on teacher workload and stress, Naylor identifies the additional diverse roles that teachers play at school that tend to include counselor, social workers, nurse, chauffeur, fund-raiser, mediator, public relations officer and entertainer (Naylor, 2001, p. 5). After school, teachers prepare lessons, meet with parents and colleagues, mark exams, make phone calls and take on a variety of community roles that reinforce an identity of "teacher" for the duration of the day.

The increasingly complex and challenging role for teachers has not been without its stressors and negative impact on teacher wellness. A review of national and international studies on teacher workload and stress describes the symptoms of a profession under stress.

> The effects include declining job satisfaction, reduced ability to meet students' needs, significant incidences (sic) of psychological disorders leading to increased absence from work, and a high proportion of claims for disability caused by stress. Stress also appears to be a factor in teachers leaving the profession in a number of countries, and is impacting internationally on recruitment (Naylor, 2001, p. 12).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) identify additional conditions of the school environment that serve as barriers and challenges to change and improvement. In the review of literature on school improvement, it was noted that creating a collaborative

school culture was essential for successful school improvement. In most schools however, "there is simply not enough opportunity and not enough encouragement for teachers to work together, learn from each other, and improve their expertise as a community" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991, p. 1). In addition job overload, professional isolation of teachers, and failed school improvement efforts have contributed to creating an environment characterized with cynicism and resistance to change (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991).

As teachers engage in school improvement and AISI they are situated in a challenging multifaceted educational environment. While they attempt to adapt and improve student achievement, they continue to work within structures that may have outlived their purpose (Hargreaves, 1984; Mitchell, Sackney and Walker, 1996). The accelerated rate of changes, additional responsibilities, and expectations associated with change, characterize a system that is struggling to recreate itself. Additional issues such as depth of change, number of changes, and the frequency of changes are crucial as expectations for teachers to make change ultimately begs the question that Evans (1996) implies in his work. How much change can teachers withstand and still sustain a sense of stability and predictability?

Conclusion

In examining the research on teachers, change and school improvement, there are several significant findings. When schools are involved in school improvement initiatives, attention must be paid to the process of change as experienced by teachers. Any change, small or big, will be experienced as loss. Acceptance and adoption of change will occur only as those who are involved in change have the opportunity to

have real conversations and create new meanings. While understanding these implications is critical to the success of school improvement initiatives, what is still at question is how teachers experience and situate themselves within this context.

There are many elements that require attention if school improvement is to be successful. School improvement is a process that is dynamic and, to be successful, requires an understanding of how individuals function and situate themselves in the context of broader change. School improvement involves a series of interactions within the context of the catalyst forces stimulating change and the constant drive for some degree of continuity and predictability. It is evident that a tension exists between the ongoing daily demands of regular teaching assignments and the requirements of an AISI project as mandated by Alberta Learning. This tension heightens the sensitive nature of the urgency-agency-energy cycle that can spiral into cynicism (Fullan, 1998). A deeper understanding of how teachers respond when they are involved in school improvement is required to understand this cycle. Given that teachers' roles and identities tend to exist in an uninterrupted continuum, how do they cope and situate themselves in their practice when involved in school improvement? As they engage in school improvement efforts what expectations do they have for themselves and the outcomes of their efforts?

Using interpretive inquiry this study attempts to respond to these questions in ways that provide insight into how teachers experience school improvement.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this interpretive inquiry is to explore the experiences of teachers involved in a school improvement project. Through interviews with teachers at the school, the teachers and I, as researcher, co-constructed the meaning of these experiences and developed an understanding of how teachers situate themselves in their practice when they are involved in a school improvement project.

As well, this study intends to examine the expectations that teachers brought with them to the school improvement project, explore whether these expectations have been met and examine the thoughts and feelings teachers have with respect to these expectations. The study addresses the expectations teachers had of their practice, their colleagues at school and the expected results for their students.

Through an exploration of how teachers experience school improvement, this research seeks to develop a better understanding of what Fullan (1995) has called the "black box" of the change process in school improvement.

Qualitative Research Framework

Qualitative research crosscuts a variety of disciplines, fields and subject matters. It can be richly descriptive, naturalistic and constructivist in nature (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research challenges the notion that a single reality exists, accepts the postmodern notion that there is more than one way of knowing the world, recognizes that getting close to the subject is critical to capturing the subject's point of view, provides opportunities to examine the constraints of everyday life and encourages a rich description of the social world (Becker, 1993 in Denzin and

Lincoln, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describes qualitative research as having a multi-method focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach. As such, all qualitative research is interpretive in nature as it seeks to understand as opposed to explain the realities and experiences of the subjects involved in the research.

School improvement is a complex process that has produced outcomes that are consistent in some respects yet inconsistent in others (Hopkins et al, 1994; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Harris, 1999). Ongoing work by Fullan (1982, 1992, 1999, 2001) and Earl and Lee (1998) has highlighted the unique nature of each school when undertaking school improvement. Each school's process is unique and as Fullan (1999, 2001) points out, one cannot simply transport the process from school to school with expectations of successful adoption and change. Qualitative research can provide a rich narrative description of the unique experiences teachers have within their school as they engage in improvement efforts.

Interpretive Inquiry

In that it is an intensely human enterprise, education is an ideal setting for interpretive research. There are three essential descriptors of interpretive research. First, interpretive research recognizes that education is a process and school is a lived experience; second, understanding in this process is knowledge gained from an inductive, hypothesis, or theory generating mode of inquiry, and, third, multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). Exploring the experiences of those involved in a school improvement process allows us to examine the multiple perspectives and complexities of the process of school improvement.

There are three possible outcomes in an interpretive inquiry. Ideas for helpful actions are identified, new questions or concerns come to the researcher's attention, and the researcher is changed by the research – that is, the researcher discovers inadequacies in his or her own initial pre-understandings (Packard and Addison, 1989, as quoted in Ellis, 1998, p. 28). Ellis (1998) adds that in an interpretive inquiry, the question must be "real" and be approached with openness, humility and engagement. The interpretive inquiry is much like the hermeneutic circle where the inquiry process consists of a series of loops, as in a spiral, where each loop attempts to bring the researcher closer to what he seeks to understand, and inform or reframe the question for the next loop (Ellis, 1998). Each loop requires data collection and interpretation before entering into another.

Research Design

This interpretive inquiry is best understood as a case study. Research is systematic inquiry and the case study is a research design that allows the researcher to study experiences in a systematic fashion (Merriam, 1988). Yin (1994, p. 9) adds that for "how" and "why" questions, the case study has a clear advantage in finding answers to these questions. It allows us to understand personal experiences and interact with those involved in the school improvement process that Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe as routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.

Another characteristic that is critical for a case study is that the experience or phenomenon being examined has a sense of being "bounded" as a system and have a commonsense obviousness to their boundaries (Merriam, 1988, pp. 9 – 10). Each

school manifests a unique environment that is characterized by the qualities of their students, teachers and community members.

Exploring the experiences of teachers involved in a school improvement project presents the researcher with multiple variables that cannot be separated. AISI school improvement projects have established specific start and end dates, have identified the members in the project and established a particular initiative to be addressed. Thus school improvement projects can be viewed as Miles and Huberman (1994) describe, "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). The examination of the process of school improvement as opposed to its outcome serves as further justification for selection of the case study approach. The focus of this case study is on the experiences of teachers involved in school improvement and how they situated themselves in school improvement, and not on the results achieved by the students. The focus of the research is on "how" (Yin, 1994, p. 9) teachers experience school improvement and will attempt to understand the routine and problematic experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) teachers encounter in their journey.

Many case studies in education are purely descriptive while many more tend to be combinations of descriptive, interpretative and historical (Merriam, 1998). It is the intent of this study to provide elements of all three. The study provides historical and descriptive elements in that it provides a detailed account of the experiences of several teachers involved in the school improvement process from beginning to end. It is also interpretive as it utilizes a rich narrative description from interviews and observations, and inductively identifies potential relationships and complexities.

Selection of Research Site

The selection of the research site was guided by several criteria. Research on change and school improvement suggests that successful change at an elementary school can occur within a three-year period (Fullan, 2001 p. 17). Given that AISI school improvement projects had concluded after three years, I sought to identify an elementary school that had been involved in a school wide innovation. In reviewing the various AISI projects on the Alberta Extranet, projects have predominantly involved elementary schools with a focus on mathematics and literacy. Teachers involved in a project over three years had greater opportunity to realize deep change where practice has been changed, beliefs and values have been identified and supporting structures had changed (Fullan, 2001). An additional consideration was that those teachers who had been involved in a project for only a year or two, would not have the perspective of the project from the onset to the conclusion.

While Fullan (2001) has not provided specifics on elementary school size and its relationship to change in his initial work on change, for the purposes of this study I searched for a school with a student population that ranged between 300 to 450 students. In my experiences with rural school divisions in Alberta and Saskatchewan, many elementary schools have tended to fall within this population range.

I contacted two school jurisdictions and shared an outline of my proposed research and research methodology. I received an immediate response from one system where a possibility for interviewing two different schools occurred. In keeping with the requirements of the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board written permission was solicited and granted by the superintendent of

schools. In reviewing the information, I opted for a kindergarten through grade six school, that I have renamed Central Elementary School to maintain confidentiality for the school division, school and participating teachers.

I made initial contact with the principal of the school, confirmed the desire of the school to participate in the study and asked to meet with the principal and teachers interested in participating in my research.

Data Collection

Case studies make extensive use of qualitative data (Merriam, 1988). Detailed descriptions of situations, direct quotations from participants and excerpts or entire documents provide the raw data that provide the depth and detail in order to gain understanding (Patton, 1980, p. 22). Qualitative case studies rely heavily upon this data and the charge to the researcher is to "get close" in order to obtain the depth and detail (Patton, 1980).

By gaining depth and detail, the researcher is able to develop a richness and breadth of language to describe and capture the multiple perspectives and complexities of relationships in the process. With the use of narratives in a case study, one can detail more closely the experiences of those involved in the phenomenon of school improvement with " an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 2).

The primary collector of data in this case study was the researcher. To understand the perspectives of others one must become engaged. "Genuine engagement" implies a commitment of "openness and humility" (Ellis, 1998, p. 18) in all contexts with teachers and I attempted to be genuine and open as I interviewed

teachers and reviewed documents and data. Approaching with humility and openness implies a trust and positive presupposition of truth-telling and seeking to understand. It is critical to hear and listen for what is being said and valued by the teacher in the discussion. As a researcher I recognized that my beliefs and values predisposed my thinking and it was my responsibility to insure that the ideas that were finally written were co-constructed with the teachers and represented as closely as possible their stories and experiences. Throughout the entire process, I attempted to keep in mind that to be effective as a researcher I had to be open to ambiguity, sensitive to context, and develop good communication skills (Merriam, 1998).

Research data were drawn from a number of sources including an opening introductory meeting, a group focus session, open semi-structured interviews, relevant documents, and a reflective journal. Interviews with personnel at the school served as the primary source of data for the study. Merriam (1988) suggests that one of the strengths of a case study is the opportunity to draw upon multiple methods of data collection where the weaknesses of one method are the strength of another allowing the researcher to get closer to understanding the experiences and processes being examined. By examining the data from the focus group session, individual interviews, and AISI reports I was able to test the understandings and insights from part to whole and whole to part while examining them from the multiple data sources.

An initial information meeting was held in early February of 2003. I met with five of the six teachers who had expressed interest in the study. The principal opted not to attend as one of the participants in the study was the vice principal who had teaching responsibilities at the school. I met with the participants for the first time in

the library. At this time five of the six interested participants attended the information meeting. I shared a brief verbal overview of the study and provided the various supporting documents as well. I included a brief written outline of the study and the required consent forms required by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board. During the brief information session I shared my experiences with AISI, my role within my school division and why I was deeply interested in hearing their stories. I explained that one of the documents was a consent form and that I would return in a week to retrieve it and answer any further questions if they had any. During this opening session three of the participants asked questions and I felt reassured that I had developed rapport with them as they began to share their stories. Two of them reached over and signed their consent forms within twenty minutes of the conversation. Two continued to listen intently nodding and near the end of our initial meeting that lasted about forty-five minutes reached over and signed their forms and began to engage in story telling. The remaining participant had her arms crossed for well over half of the meeting and rarely spoke throughout the session. It was not until I shared with the group that I felt guilty taking up more time than I indicated I would earlier and that we would get the opportunity to talk more later, that she leaned over and stated that she believed that this was important and she wished to participate. She signed the consent form as well. Later in the study when I was at the school conducting interviews, she reminded me over lunch in the staff room that she did not want to see this study sit on the shelf collecting dust.

Before leaving the first meeting, I made arrangements to have the group conduct a storyboard type of activity where participants could bring artifacts from the

study. Given the AISI project had already been completed, the artifacts would serve as physical reminders of the experiences and activities the group had had. The group agreed this would be a good idea given the circumstances.

Approximately two weeks later I returned to Central Elementary School to conduct the focus group and looked forward with great anticipation to the artifacts and beginning the interviewing process. In true teacher fashion, I brought along snacks and the school had made arrangements for the interview to be held in a seminar room. I prepared the seating arrangements and tested the audio tape recorder to ensure it was working appropriately. As the teachers entered the room shortly before 4:00 p.m., I was a bit alarmed that none had brought artifacts with them. All they carried were coffee mugs with fresh coffee. At this point only five of the six teachers had arrived. We proceeded with the interview and I attempted to guide the group through several steps. I reminded them again of the purpose of the study and attempted to guide them through the chronological history of their AISI projects beginning with the first ideas and introduction to AISI. I also attempted through the interview to delineate activities as they occurred each year and sought to clarify the chronology of events as best as I could with the group, confirming the sequence of events as it unfolded. Approximately half way through the focus group discussion the sixth participant arrived and joined in the discussion. At the conclusion of the focus session, the sixth participant apologized for being late and asked to withdraw from the study. Any comments she had made through the focus group were deleted and beyond this point, the teacher is not referenced in the study.

Two weeks after the focus group discussion, arrangements were made with the school to conduct individual interviews. After discussion with school administration it was determined it would be best that interviews be conducted through the day and arrangements for a substitute teacher for the day were made at the researcher's expense. Interviews were conducted in a special education classroom and interviews lasted between one to one and a half hours. Four of the five interviews were completed on that day. The remaining interview was rescheduled to accommodate the final participant's schedule and was conducted approximately four weeks later.

In addition to the interviews, I was also able to obtain a copy of the school's AISI project from the Alberta Extranet as well as a copy of a presentation handout where Central Elementary School's project was included among those the school division was undertaking.

Throughout the course of the interviews, I maintained a reflective journal to note observations, insights and questions that occurred at the interviews. In keeping with the understanding of interpretive inquiry, the journal documented my own changes and observations as the study evolved.

As a researcher, my goal was to describe the experiences and situations of teachers such that others who might read these descriptions would recognize similarities in their own experiences.

Data Analysis

The purpose of my analysis was to develop an understanding of the experiences of teachers involved in school improvement. Data gathering and analysis was completed immediately following data collection.

Cresswell (1994) suggests that data analysis is an eclectic process and while there is no single right way, the researcher must be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. In addition, the researcher must be open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanations for the data (Cresswell, 1994, p. 153).

Tesch (1990 in Cresswell, 1994) suggests that when a researcher works with unstructured data from interviews the affinity process is most useful. All the transcripts of the interview were read through many times and ideas, comments or notes were jotted down in the margins. As I reflected on the various notes that I had jotted in the margins, I began to identify themes that seemed to be consistent for all the participants. Once this task was completed for all the interviews, the affinity process was used to categorize major topics, unique topics and remaining questions or thoughts. Using these topics, the text of all the interviews were color coded and physically disaggregated into the various categories using a cut and paste process. The data were reviewed several times to determine if the categories and topics could be reduced further and most critically if they made sense by moving from the part to the whole and whole to the part.

Artifacts included a downloaded copy of the AISI project from the Alberta Extranet where all AISI projects are posted, handouts from the annual AISI

conference and copies of reference material on balanced literacy that were shared by the participants in the study. The artifacts did not provide significant information given that Central Elementary's project was woven in with several others. The handouts were content oriented and described elements of practice in language arts and did not reflect on the process of implementation or roles that the participants may have played.

In addition to analyzing the data gathered from the various teachers involved, I continued to write and analyze my own thoughts and ideas that I recorded in my reflective journal. I used the reflective process that Mitchell, Sackney and Walker (1996) describe as having three levels: the descriptive, analytical and motivational.

Within interpretive inquiry there is an expectation that the researcher is changed as a result of the process. Almost like a stranger reading my notes for the first time, it has been a valuable learning exercise to read and reflect on my thought processes and ways that I have changed throughout this journey.

Role of the Researcher

In selecting this research topic it was important for me as a researcher to understand the significance of the research and implications for me in my role. In reflecting on my own approach to education I have consistently used the notion that if an activity or learning would not be good enough for my child, then it would not be good enough for anyone else's child. The internal drive to improve my own ability to teach and learn – my moral purpose - has impacted not only me, but also those with whom I have worked. Those colleagues who have shared my passion for learning have usually enjoyed their journeys and dialogues with me as we have sought to

develop our understandings of learning, teaching and knowledge. As Lave (1992, as quoted in Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p. 227) states,

> "Learning, viewed as a socially situated activity, must be grounded in a social ontology that conceives of the person as an acting being, engaged in the world." She proposes that "central identity-generating activities take place" in the "communities of practice" in which learners participate, and explains that "learning is, in this purview, more basically a process of coming to be, of forging identities in activity in the world."

Central to my discussions in the past and to this interpretive inquiry are the dialogues with teachers in their "community of practice" to clarify and comprehend their identities.

As a researcher it is critical to recognize that my own biases and prejudices must be transparent and understood by the teachers involved in the research. It is not possible to separate oneself from his or her life experiences and in qualitative research it is critical to recognize the influence these experiences have had in shaping not only our understandings but the assumptions and beliefs that guide our actions.

While qualitative research may be eclectic in its methods, it brings with it a tremendous responsibility for the researcher. As a researcher, one must become the "bricoleur or jack-of-all-trades" given the diverse tasks associated with data collection, data analysis, and the ability to interact and connect with the various bodies of literature and research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). My prior experiences with cognitive coaching, interviewing and working with teachers were called upon within this process.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations within the design of this research. The research skills and abilities that I bring to the activity have ultimately affected the quality and depth of information uncovered in the interviews and analysis of data. As a researcher I was challenged continually to remain open to the feelings and nuances presented by the teachers in the interviews and understand the ideas and thoughts as if they were my own. The various teachers and their ability to recollect, accurately describe, and reflect on their experiences over the three-year project in which they were involved was also a limitation of the study.

Delimitations

The study is restricted to school improvement efforts undertaken under the aegis of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement and the specific school site. It is limited to one elementary school that has undertaken a three-year project and has a grade configuration that does not extend beyond kindergarten through grade 6. Only teachers who had been involved from the start to the conclusion of the project were involved in the research.

Significance of the Study

By examining the experiences of teachers involved in a school improvement project under the aegis of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement there are several possible significant outcomes.

For policy makers this study will provide an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of experiences of teachers when they are involved in school improvement and as a result of this understanding, policy makers may have cause to

reflect on the structures and models that are being used to support change and school improvement.

For teachers involved in AISI projects, it may be an opportunity to recognize the similarities that exist and where they do not, provide opportunities to reflect on the approaches used within their own schools.

As a change agent within a school system, it has provided an opportunity for me to engage in conversations and reflection at a deeper level than time currently permits me to do within the current constraints of my work. As a result of this process, it has enabled me to develop the deeper understandings of teacher experiences and ways that I might support and facilitate the changes that will benefit not only my children, but also all students in the Division in which I am employed.

As noted earlier, it is my hope that this research will be perceived as contributing to the current body of research in school improvement in Canada.

Finally, as with all research, there exists the possibility of the development of new questions for future research on school improvement.

Ethical Issues

In keeping with the requirements of the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board the following steps were taken.

1. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the superintendent of the participating school division.
2. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from each of the participants.

3. The study's purpose and process were explained to each of the participants and participants were reminded that in keeping with guidelines of the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board they could withdraw at any point in time, or if they had questions regarding the protocol of the study, they could contact either the chair of my research committee or the chair of the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board.

4. Audiotapes, field notes and transcripts were filed in a secure location.

5. A professional secretary was hired and she signed a confidentiality statement. She transcribed all of the audiotapes.

6. The school and research participants have all been assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

7. The research proposal was submitted to the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board and the appropriate approval was granted.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology and procedures used in the course of the study. Given the nature of the study it was determined that an interpretive inquiry approach was the most appropriate methodology to use. Given the circumstances of the individuals within the school and the time bound nature of the study, a case study was the most appropriate method to meet the purposes of the study. The selection of the research site, data analysis,

role of the researcher, delimitations, implications, significance of the study and ethical considerations were also addressed.

Chapter 4: The Participants, Their Context and AISI Project

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the participants, their context and their AISI project. It is the goal of this chapter to develop a deeper understanding of the identities of the teachers involved in the research and the complex environment in which they work. While it is not an exhaustive set of descriptors, it is intended to highlight the significant personal traits and experiences that define each of the participants, their working environment and the AISI project they were engaged in.

The Participants

The following section provides a brief professional biography of each of the participants in the study. To protect the identity of the participants each has been assigned a pseudonym.

One of the purposes of interpretive inquiry is to develop a sense of the feelings and thoughts behind the actions of the participants. The brief description that follows attempts to highlight the characteristics that define each of the participants. In many ways, these characteristics describe the moral purpose or motivation level of reflection that defines the ethical justification for an individual's actions (Michell, Sackney and Walker, 1996).

Shirley

Shirley has taught her entire career with the current school division. She began her teaching career in a small rural community in Alberta. Half of her time was spent on a Hutterite Settlement, and the other half teaching special education and enrichment in a small town setting. After one year she moved to another small rural

community and taught there for eleven years. Again, she taught Special Education but also taught a wide range of subjects including grade one art, grade three social studies, grade six social studies and most of the grade five curriculum. Funding cuts at her school reduced the number of teaching staff and she was notified of her transfer to Central Elementary School near the end of the 1999-2000 school year. At this time, the principal from Central Elementary School inquired if she would like to go to New York to learn about a new instructional approach that would be implemented in the fall. She accepted but was left with questions as to where the money was coming from to support such an initiative given the cuts occurring at her current school. As she pointed out later, she had never heard of AISI till a fall staff meeting at Central Elementary School.

Her first teaching assignment at Central Elementary School in the fall of 2000 was a grade six classroom. In addition to becoming aware of AISI and a member of the writing committee, she also became involved in a Telus Learning Project. Telus Learning projects are online learning projects developed by teachers that provide students with opportunities to learn online, collaborate with other classes online, and provide real-world learning experiences. The projects are expected to reflect Alberta Learning curriculum expectations, focus on higher thinking skills and challenge students.

She explains, "My load at the time wouldn't let me (take a greater role). Like in grade six that year I had thirty students. I had thirty-one the next and thirty-two the next, so you can't take on a lot of extra doing that."

Shirley's commute to work is a half hour drive each way and her youngest child at the time of her transfer was one year old, and her oldest was in grade three. She has a sitter come to her home to provide childcare for her family. Her husband leaves for work at 7:00 a.m. and she leaves generally around 7:30 a.m. As she looked back on the transfer to the school and then leaving for New York for the professional development she commented "That October when we went to New York the same week my husband started a new job and it was kind of – that part was totally overwhelming."

There was a sense that Shirley was still struggling to feel comfortable with demands placed on her at school and her priorities at home.

> Now this year I have grade 3, which is probably this year I might have had a little time other than it is a whole new curriculum and a different ball game from what I have been doing. But we'll see what happens. (Shirley)

Her recollection of the various authors attending the school was vague and she struggled to identify their names. In the second year of AISI she stopped attending the writing committee due to demands on her time at school and at home.

Shirley highlighted two dimensions of her practice that were important to her. These were the difference she makes as a teacher with her students and her perception of herself as a learner.

> The third year I was in grade 6, they were an awesome group. I had 32 kids and like yes you still had the marking and what not. But the behaviours - I had one student with behaviours and he ended up on an in-school suspension. He came back and was kind of powerful to me because he actually liked being in class. He almost ended up getting out again and he was almost in tears. "Please don't send me to the office. If I go to the office again, I am out for the rest of the year." Well this was in June and I smiled and said, "What do you think

> should I do? What you did was really inappropriate." I actually ended up giving him a second chance and he was like gold the rest of the year. So that third year, I was almost shell shocked from the year. This year too, I have one little guy and every night I am writing up something on his anecdotal records because he has just been --- I have never seen a child so stubborn in my life. (Shirley)

In both instances the students were of concern and Shirley's efforts enabled each of them to succeed.

Her perception of herself as a learner was also tied to the difference she made for her students. She described her involvement in the Telus projects.

> I was involved in each one of those and so that was in addition to the other things that I was doing. And again, I was excited about those because I got to learn new computer things. It sounded like opportunities for the kids to learn things and opportunities for me as well. (Shirley)

Bev

Bev is currently in her sixteenth year of teaching and has spent all but her first six months of teaching at Central Elementary School. She has spent ten years teaching grade two and the past six teaching grade one. In addition to teaching, Bev has taken on numerous roles at the school. She is one of the two technology coordinators at the school who respond to technical problems and create student records profiles for new students at the school. She is also one of the Telus project leaders. She has been on the professional development committee, swim team, staff morale committee, track team and has become one of the two leaders of the AISI project at her school, particularly at the division one level. From being a member of the writing committee, she has emerged as one of the two informal leaders of the AISI project in year two of the AISI project.

She demonstrated a level of sensitivity and reflection that was grounded in two dimensions. One dimension is the way she is perceived as teacher by her students and the influence this perception has.

> Every interaction that I have with them has the potential to make or break them and there is that saying about teachers – you are the keepers of their dreams. And so the way I respond to "Can I go to the bathroom?" the way I respond to "I can't get this word", all of those things from the tiny little mundane to those big " I don't know how to read" – I am affecting this kid by the words I choose and the way my face works. (Bev)

The second dimension is the set of expectations she places on herself as a teacher and a learner. For example, responding to an article in the *Reading Teacher*, that suggested that teachers should have their students self-correct and that emphasized the benefits self-correction would have for children, Bev noted,

> And thinking through the thought process that I go through as those kids self-correct, and how I can gently support them and how I can praise them when they do it and how I can give them that lead to see if they will self-correct and that they were writing this up as if this was rocket science. I was thinking isn't that just naturally what you do as a teacher? It was interesting to see the difference in perception in what I thought was just standard, and that is just like "do" and they were sort of saying, " Hey teachers maybe you should do this." (Bev)

Bev also connected her commitment to learning to the difference that it makes for students.

> When you get excited, you take stuff home and you read books because you are excited. To me as a teacher, you have to have that or you go stale. I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that to my students. (Bev)

Balancing her commitment to teaching and learning was an equally strong commitment to her identity as a mother. As she described herself, "I'm a mom and

I'm a mom first. I might not have the same pretty little games in my room and maybe my bulletin boards don't get changed quite as often, but I am so much a better teacher because I'm a mom and because I have that understanding of the kids." Bev's focus on establishing positive relationships with students and understanding their individual needs was given priority over other actions and activities she might undertake given her understanding of how students perceive her and the interactions she has with them. This priority did not appear to undermine the importance Bev places on student learning or her own learning.

Jill

Jill is in her seventeenth year of teaching and this past year has been her eleventh at Central Elementary School and the school division. She has spent six years with three additional divisions across Alberta teaching Special Education and language learning. Over the course of the AISI project she taught grade two for one year and grade four for two years. She has since moved on to teach grade five in the same school.

Jill has been involved with the professional development committee in the past. During the three years of the first AISI project she was involved as a member of the writing committee. In addition she took an active role ordering art supplies for the school in her capacity as part of the art committee. Her role also changed in year two of AISI as she also emerged as one of the informal leaders with Bev and provided direction for the AISI project thereafter. Through the course of the project, she dropped the art committee and added the friends committee and the student class list committee.

Jill's commitment to AISI also highlighted her dedication to ensuring that students should be the central focus of school. In her commentary about AISI she noted that AISI should be "for kids - about kids". While she commented on the politics that were part of the AISI conferences she stressed the need for all involved to focus on students.

> Ultimately it gets down to little Johnny sitting in the classroom and he cannot read. We need Johnny to read. Let's continue (with AISI) and we want all our head representatives there because we want this funding to continue. But, by the same token, I am thinking Johnny is not reading over here. So you know what I mean, I would like to see it much more over here directly with kids. (Jill)

Jill conveyed a compelling need and urgency to focus on students and student learning. For her there can be no higher priority and this reflected her moral purpose and belief as to the nature and purpose of education.

In addition to her involvement at school, Jill was involved in quilting, aerobics and Tai Chi after school. Over the course of the three years of the AISI project Jill also traveled to Edmonton every weekend to tend to her ailing father who passed away in the second year of the AISI project. Following this she continued to drive in to Edmonton to tend to her mother and move her into a new condo. Her family commitment involved being away from the classroom for extended periods and meant she was unable to connect with her friends as frequently as she would have liked.

Within the school she has taken on the leadership role to discuss language learning issues and to persuade and motivate her peers to become more engaged in the project. She saw herself as a learner and challenged her own comfort zone in terms of what she knew and was capable of. She is planning to use a deferred salary leave in order to return to university and study topics beyond education.

> I decided that as people we tend to gravitate towards what we are most comfortable with in life. For me that was science and math, and so as a teacher I decided to focus on language arts and art because those are my areas that I am not so good at. So I have decided to go back and take either long distance courses or maybe spending some of that time in university. (Jill)

Bill

At the time of the interview in spring of 2004, Bill was completing his thirty-fourth year of teaching. He was awaiting notification for a teacher exchange to England and if that was not successful, he was contemplating teaching English as a Second Language in Asia. Bill had spent the majority of his teaching career with the current school division and had taught high school as well as a range of elementary grades and subjects.

Bill was the most senior teacher interviewed and held a number of strong opinions about society, Alberta Learning, and the role of a teacher as a learner. His love for language was evident as he spoke about society.

> It really disturbs me you know, this is the societal thing. We have lost our love of language. We have lost our ability. We don't have parents correcting kids anymore. Right now my big problem is I have kids who can't tell the difference between wall, well and while. And they use them interchangeably.(Bill)

His identity as a learner was reflected in part by his recent coursework at the University of Alberta where in the summer of 2002 he took a math class to improve his ability to teach math. His sense of morale purpose and commitment to learning is highlighted in the following quotation.

> You know people talking about this is what we're doing and here's the kinds of growth that we are having. I mean that's what we are here for. We are here to teach kids. And to do the same old, same old

> because it is easy and we have done it for thirty years is not going to cut it. We have to keep up with what is happening out there and if somebody comes along with a better way to teach it, to teach anything, we need to be paying attention to this. Somebody who has left university twenty years ago and has never gone back and thought about what is happening in math, that's a little scary. (Bill)

Bill has been involved in a variety of committees throughout his time at Central Elementary School including math, language learning, writing committees and science. He has been one of the bargaining representatives within his local Alberta Teachers Association group. His active involvement has ceased in the past few years and he believes that it is time for others to take over. He is willing to be called upon to assist while he is still part of the system.

Leland

Leland was the youngest of the teachers interviewed. He taught in the Yukon for three years and joined Central Elementary school at the start of the 1999 school year. He taught primarily Special Education in the Yukon and he continued to teach special education when he joined Central Elementary School. He commutes to work with a half hour drive each way and the move from the north meant a return to where he was raised. He has begun a Master of Education program focusing on Special Education.

Leland provided a pullout program for students with special needs and was invited to sit on the writing committee when he began teaching at the school. As the AISI project began to develop in 2000, he played a peripheral role as he was just beginning to find his way about the school.

> I was pretty busy with other things that I was doing with assessments, report writing and parent meetings for special education the times the writing committee was meeting. Whenever I did sit in on it I would

> try to provide some input, but at that time I was till feeling fairly green. I didn't know our population. I think that we had people on our committee that had a better feel for the school and the population of the school. I was just trying to get a feel for that and trying to listen because we had mature staff on there that I looked up to in terms of their instruction and I felt that I could learn somewhat from listening. In the second and third year, I kind of tailed off on the committee. (Leland)

Leland viewed himself as a risk taker and a learner.

> You have to be a learner again, because you learn from trying something. It's not only learning new ideas, but learning from what you do as well and the instant teachers stop learning then they stop being good teachers. They do the same thing over and over. Society is changing. Kids are changing and you can't use the same strategies with kids today that they used fifteen years ago. (Leland)

Upon returning from professional development experiences he tried new teaching strategies with his students. If they did not work, he indicated to his class that they all took a risk in trying and what they needed to do was see what they have learned and how they could improve upon what was tried. As Leland described the energizing effects that AISI conferences had on teachers one gets the sense that he was also describing the kind of teacher he aspired to be for his students.

> I think if you look at the front of your classroom and you have a teacher up there that is very vibrant and they are excited about what they are doing as opposed to somebody walking in and they have done the same lesson for the last five or six years, I don't know if the same energy is there. I think as people have gone out and learned new things and AISI projects have helped us with that. I think there is that energy in the school and I think if you walk into most schools there is that energy. It is very different. I like to think it is anyways. (Leland)

Leland's self described approach of risk taker, learner and collaborator with students creates a personal vision of teaching that is dynamic, growing and energized.

Consistent with the others, he has student learning as a central focus in what he does as a teacher with the goal to make a difference in the lives and learning of his students.

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, Leland became the vice principal of Central Elementary School.

Conclusion

Each of the participants portrayed a sense of moral purpose and compelling urgency to address the needs of students as well as maintain a balance in their personal lives. Their need to be learners was connected to the learning needs of their students, and it was portrayed as an ongoing dynamic force that if not addressed, had the potential to result in stagnant teaching and unmet student needs. From Bill, the retiring teacher, to Leland the relative newcomer, each portrayed an unrelenting demand on and commitment from the teachers to be learners in order to meet the needs of students as learners.

A tacit assumption within the AISI guidelines is that given the opportunity teachers would engage actively in school improvement activities to respond to the urgent needs within their school. These activities would be fuelled by the energy flowing from the moral purpose teachers have. Leland's observation that he had not seen such an elevated level of excitement or energy prior to AISI seems to suggest that provided the opportunity teachers' moral purpose would cause them to engage in school improvement activities.

It is also evident that each of the participants demonstrated a capacity to reflect on his or her own practice and it was guided by a compelling focus on student

learning. It is through the process of reflection that individuals are able to uncover their beliefs and values and develop consistency between their practice and their beliefs and values (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000). The participants to this point demonstrated the potential for reflection and change given their moral purpose and focus on student learning. Fullan reinforces the importance of moral purpose.

> I have argued that teachers are moral change agents – that the moral purpose of schools is to make a difference in the lives of students and that making a difference is literally to make changes that matter. (Fullan, 2001, p. 16)

Each of the teachers involved in the study identified themselves as moral change agents and have set the stage for their journey to make a difference in their school.

The Research Context

In the group focus session and individual interviews a number of consistent descriptions and perceptions emerged regarding the staff, the school, community and provincial environment. These perceptions had a bearing on the project and how it unfolded. Taken together, they aptly represent elements of the current educational pressure points that Hargreaves (1994) has identified: new problems, multiple innovations, collapse of moral certainties, and changing certainties regarding methods and strategies used by teachers. More recently, Hargreaves describes teachers working in a knowledge society with three significant dimensions.

> First, it comprises an expanded scientific, technical and educational sphere. Second, it involves complex ways of processing a circulating knowledge and information in a service-based economy. Third, it entails basic changes in how corporate organizations function so that they enhance continuous innovation in products and services by

> creating systems, teams, and cultures that maximize the opportunities for mutual, spontaneous learning. (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 17)

Teachers exist in two inseparable environments – school and broader community - that provide their own set of challenges and expectations. Teachers within this study experienced the pressure points internally and the challenges of the external environment that Hargreaves (1994, 2003) has described.

The School Staff

Individually and collectively the staff perceived themselves to be "master teachers". They cited practices of working together to review written work, involvement in previous initiatives including writing portfolios and the school's rating by the Fraser Institute portraying them as doing a good job relative to other schools as determined by the school Alberta Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results. Their general focus on student performance resulted in consensus that while students' marks overall were good, writing was an area that all needed to work on.

Other contextual issues emerged through the interviews that clearly had an impact on teachers' involvement in the AISI project. Longer- serving teachers had an historical perspective regarding strained relations between the school and the district administration. As Bev indicated,

> We have had a history in our school of having difficult staff. Just decisions that have been made at central office level, at the administration level that people haven't understood and haven't been communicated clearly and so on. So it always feels like you're battling that. You know you go along and you have this great thing, but then wham, you get hit with another thing from left field and everybody is thrown off the deep end. Then how do you get them to buy into something that you are saying is great because they are so mad at the whole school? (Bev)

> When you are in turmoil about decisions that are made, and when you feel like things have been done to you and you don't understand why, and you don't understand the philosophy behind it and you don't feel you can communicate how you feel about that without fear of retribution, you can't be excited and so I look at our school and I think you know, you kind of got cross purposes here sometimes. The intentions are good and if those intentions are actually clearly communicated there wouldn't be that "this is being done to me", it would be okay. I may not like this necessarily but I can understand why it has to happen.(Bev)

In addition to the difficulties presented by an history of poor relations between the school and central office, changes in staffing during the first two years of their involvement in AISI had a considerable impact on the success of the project. A vacuum in leadership and expertise was created with the losses of the vice principal who initially spearheaded the AISI project and a staff member who had strengths in guided reading.

During the group focus discussion with the participants it was evident that the perceptions they held of the project had evolved. As I asked questions and attempted to create a chronology of events, it was as if they did not wish to return to the experience they had had in their first two years. They continued to draw back to where they were at the end of the three years and what they had learned. Their body posture as we spoke of years one and two was revealing as they tended to lay back somewhat slouched and discussed this period with some reluctance. However, as we entered discussions about the third year, their language became more animated and they began to interrupt each other to add details. They sat up more and leaned forward into the conversation. Reassurances and nods of support were visible and their conversations began to scaffold from one to the other. As a group they were proud of their accomplishments, and even as they spoke of challenges, barriers and

other dimensions, there was a sense of having overcome whatever it was that was there and achieving success. Clearly they were a group that had developed momentum and a shared sense of accomplishment over the three years of the project.

The Parent Community

The teachers in the study perceived there was strong parental support for the school and the quality of education children received. However, they felt that parental involvement and awareness of AISI was very limited. In the second round of AISI Bev began to provide updates of the project and shared them with the school parent group on a regular basis.

Fullan highlights the benefits of parental involvement. "The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement "(2001, p. 198). He also goes to note that each community needs to recognize their own particular conditions and "understand the different forms of parent participation and their consequences for the student and other school personnel" (Fullan, 2001, p. 198). Based on the responses in the interviews, parents generally acted as recipients of information with regards to AISI. While the guidelines for the implementation of AISI projects (Alberta, 1999) encourage parental involvement, it appeared that they were not a significant influence on the improvement activity throughout the project. Based on the teachers' descriptions it would appear that Central Elementary School is consistent with other schools where parents remain "an unleashed force as far as the majority of schools and communities are concerned" (Fullan, 2001, p. 208).

The School Division

Just prior to the implementation of AISI, the Division, along with other school divisions in the Province of Alberta, was engaged in labour negotiations that had become strained. The school division had a reputation in the eyes of the teachers as being a difficult negotiator. Jill reflected on the years leading up to AISI.

> Before the actual strike, for years before that, we had significant negotiation difficulties. Where we were ready to strike, they were threatening to lock us out. You have to turn in your keys. You are not allowed to come into the school. I don't care if your kid is in gymnastics and it is held there (at the school) you will not enter our building and things like that. So I think that's when our morale really hit low. We were at a point where you expect me to put in my own time and I packed up my own stuff. We had teachers that had bought so many resources just so that they could teach their grades because resources were so outdated. So teachers had gone out and spent their own money because there was no money to buy resources and to just to teach their classes. They were packing stuff up and like it's out of here kind of thing. Once you pack up all your stuff how much is left in your classroom? That was when it was really bad. There was actually a strike (other schools in the Province). It was like we are talking of striking and they are locking you out. It was not happy. It was not happy at all. (Jill)

Jill articulated the strongest sense of an adversarial non-collaborative relationship between teachers and their division administration and the province.

With the introduction of AISI in 2000, Bev observed a significant increase in access to professional development opportunities that began to develop collaborative relationships at the school. Staff regularly attended with a colleague or two thereby promoting more opportunities to communicate and develop collegiality. She added that in addition to facilitating the relationships between those who attended conferences together, this also contributed to the growth of morale on staff at their school.

Jill's earlier comments highlighted the ongoing tension between Central Elementary School's effort to increase collegiality and collaboration on their staff and the lasting impact of the negative perception of the school division's and province's approach to dealing with negotiations. Fullan acknowledges the impact of division practice on a school.

> It is possible for an individual school to become highly collaborative despite the district it is in, but it is not likely that it will stay collaborative. If the district does not foster professional learning communities by design, it undermines them by default. We now know that schools will not develop if left to their own devices (Fullan, 2001, p. 165).

The impact of the actions by both the provincial government and division leaders appears to have far reaching effects on teacher attitudes toward both these bodies and initiatives they have brought forth.

The A.I.S.I. Project

At the beginning of the 2000 – 2001 school year staff were made aware of AISI at a staff meeting and informed there were three years of funding for a school improvement project. The information was received with a significant degree of scepticism by the staff.

> You know I think that there is always that same scepticism because we have so traditionally been hit with things without being persuaded by the merits how this is really going to affect kids in my class. It is sort of top down. We're not saying now that we are expecting you to do this, and you don't have to do that anymore. (Bev)

> As far as I was concerned, we have a lump sum of money for one year. Yeah, it is supposed to be a three-year project, but until the money comes in the second year, I am not counting on the second year until the money come comes in the third year. (Bill)

As Leland explained, "Okay sure, we got these dollars coming into the school – great – or the Division level, but we had no idea what it was all about." Staff were asked what they would like to work on and what areas the school was potentially lacking in. It was generally agreed by staff, that while the school's Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results were good, writing was an area most students struggled with. The vice principal of the day led the writing committee which had already been in place for a couple of years and they established a three-year plan to schedule professional development opportunities and invite authors to visit the school. The vice principal acted as the leader of project in terms of goal and direction while the principal supervised and directed the professional development opportunities. As noted by Bev, the principal was the "money guy".

At the start of the 2000-2001 year as well, the principal of the school invited Leland to a meeting and asked him if he would be interested in attending a conference in New York on a new approach to dealing with reading. The program was called Fast for Word and would generally support literacy and attempt to address some of the unmet speech pathology needs. Leland and Shirley attended the conference in New York in October, 2000.

An author from Calgary presented in year one of AISI and was not received favourably by the staff. In the spring, the vice principal left the school for another position and the committee drifted rudderless till the end of the school year.

> We went to a lot of conferences and we did the writing stuff. It was sort of top – down. I mean we had sort of made the decision to go with writing, but it sort of felt like the principal was saying, you can go to this conference and you can go to this conference and we had no sense in where this was going and how this was pulling together as a school. It sort of felt piece meal like people were shooting off in all

directions and we didn't really have a "this is what we are doing". (Bev)

The writing committee reconvened in the fall of 2001 and under the leadership of Bev and Jill began to regroup for the second year of the project. Bev and Jill were invited by school division AISI coordinator to attend a balanced literacy cohort as a possible undertaking for AISI at their school. After attending the meeting, they returned to the staff and began to persuade and energize other staff members to become involved. The writing committee scheduled an author to visit the school in year two and another author in year three. At this point in year two, they were informed by the school division's AISI Coordinator that they should be purchasing resources to support their writing and balanced literacy goals. This was the first time teachers were given notification that they should be spending money beyond professional development and purchasing support resources for the school.

Concerns developed over funding. Several of the participants noted that questions arose on staff as to where the funding for the international professional development and new resources was coming from. Was it going to take away from the school instructional budget? Were the dollars really there? How much was available?

A significant turning point in the AISI project for the school occurred when staff attended the AISI Conference in the fall of 2001. As Jill notes below, understandings of the purpose of AISI, spending of resources and roles of individual teachers changed significantly at this point.

> We went to the AISI (conference) and it was like a big light bulb over your head because I got the impression there were divisions where it

was like we've got AISI and everybody is doing this. It was really cool, because there are a lot of things in teaching that you think, wouldn't it be great if we could do this or wouldn't it be great if we could go to this place, if we had materials to do this, if we had time to do this? (Jill)

There were people that were just excited about learning and what they are doing. They wanted to showcase it, and it was electric in there. I can't think of a better term to describe it. I didn't see it ten or twelve years ago in high school. I didn't see it five years ago in school. People were self-contained in their classrooms and we didn't find out a lot of the great things that teachers were doing out there and that is the one thing that AISI did. Having the AISI conference where people can share those ideas and share the growth and share what they are doing in their classrooms - there was just excitement there. The enthusiasm you saw on everybody's faces as you walked around where all these displays were, it was incredible. So in the third year, two of our staff members presented. They couldn't believe it. They came back from that and their excitement level had jumped to a whole new level. (Leland)

Throughout the three years of the AISI project most of the staff members were encouraged to attend professional development activities by the school principal and usually two or more people were sent together. In year three more staff were sent to the AISI conference and this furthered the understanding of AISI for the staff.

The understanding of AISI and its potential to have an impact on classroom instruction grew over the three years of the project. However, in the minds of participants in this study, the entire staff did not share this understanding. At the time of the interview with staff in year one of the second iteration of AISI significant doubts still remained.

Understanding of AISI still wasn't solid. To this date, we have numbers of individuals that wouldn't – I wouldn't even guess at a percentage that even understand what AISI is. (Leland)

You know our staff, I still don't think that they have, they don't have a clue of what AISI is like. They just don't. (Jill)

Monitoring of the results for the AISI project was carried out by the school division AISI Coordinator. While teachers monitored their students for improvement and these were observed by teachers and referenced in the interviews, there was a sense by the group that in order to realize improvements in writing, it would take several years to have a significant impact. Levels of participation and monitoring change were highlighted as two significant factors influencing change and improvements in writing.

> I don't know if you'll know it. I can see it already in my kids' writing and in kids' reading – definitely. I think that one of the biggest things that we are going to see is that everybody is sort of on this wave length. So by the time next year's grade one kids have gone through, not even the grade one, grade two, grade three all the way up to grade six and look at how their achievement exams are and see if that's the trend. I don't know if you can say immediately, yes there's payback. (Bev)

> How can we then change things so that those needs are being met? We had an interesting discussion and we had teachers that said, "You know I am not sure that this is it. I am not sure that this is how it would all fit in." Then they approached the program and said "You know kids really like doing this." They're still saying "Is this actually going to be reflected in their writing?" You know time will tell. We need to work with it for a while to see what kind of impact is that actually going to have. (Jill)

Following the third year of the AISI project, the writing committee has not met and does not exist at the school. The balanced literacy project has continued to evolve with guided reading becoming the primary focus of the project in the second round.

Conclusion

The teacher biographies provided in this chapter, coupled with a description of the complex environment in which they live and the discussion of the broader educational issues existing within their division, provide a sense of the thoughts, feelings and actions that were occurring prior to, during and after the first AISI project in Central Elementary School.

Two of the pressure points Hargreaves (1994) identified are highlighted by teachers in the study. New roles and mandates have been added for teachers with no identification of those elements to be discarded or discontinued. The changes appear to be additive with no substitution or removal of practices. Second, the addition of innovations has the potential to create overload. It is evident from all the teachers that innovations have continued to inundate their roles. Telus Learning projects and AISI initiatives have placed demands on their time that otherwise were not there.

The complex environment that Huberman (1983) described over two decades ago continues to exist. These include changing student needs and numbers with the start of each school year, changing school assignments, and the omnipresent recognition that establishing a personal relationship with each student is a precursor to a successful learning experience.

The teachers at Central Elementary School work in a complex work environment that is fuelled with a sense of urgency and their moral purpose. While their initial participation in the school's AISI project reflected a degree of reluctance and scepticism, it is evident from the group discussion that their confidence and sense of efficacy from their second and third year of participation increased as they

described these years with more enthusiasm and energy. Their identities as teachers and learners were contextualized in the learning experiences they provided for their students and the successes their students experienced. While the purpose of AISI was initially described in terms of improved learning outcomes for students, there was recognition on their part that these outcomes were grounded in a set of learning expectations for themselves as learners first and teachers second.

As Senge argues, those entering into a change initiative or school improvement effort do so within the context of multiple influences.

> This means involving everyone in the system in expressing their aspirations, building their awareness, and developing their capabilities together. In a school that learns, people who traditionally may have been suspicious of one another – parents and teachers, educators and local businesspeople, administrators and union members, people inside and outside the school walls, students and adults – recognize their common stake in the future of the school system and the things they can learn from one another (Senge, 2000, p. 5).

The professional biographies of the participants, description of the school and its community, and outline of the AISI project begin to create the "black box" and the setting for the themes and understandings that have emerged from the experiences and perceptions of the teachers involved in this project as they undertook their school improvement initiative.

Chapter 5: Themes and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter examines the various themes that have emerged from the interviews with the teachers involved in the study. Analysis of the data focused on the development of categories, and has included multiple re-readings of the interviews, identification of key phrases and repeated themes, and identification of themes that appear to make sense holistically for all of the participants as well as individually for each of the participants. According to Merriam (1988), "the development of categories is a part of the analysis process and involves looking for recurring regularities in the data" (p. 133). Devising categories is generally an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the constructs made explicitly by the participants of the study (Merriam, 1988, p. 133).

Emerging Themes and Analysis

The teachers at Central Elementary School were reluctant to accept AISI when it arrived at their school in the fall of 2000 and struggled with their understanding of the purpose of AISI throughout the three years of the project. Many factors including broader provincial issues, division concerns and local school attitudes contributed to teachers' initial scepticism and reluctance to accept and understand AISI. Past provincial government actions and initiatives, division negotiations and poor morale within the school were cited as elements that initially shaped Central Elementary School teachers' perceptions toward AISI. A number of additional variables such as length of tenure at the school, changing teacher assignment and individual personal

circumstances also influenced the readiness and capacity of teachers to participate in a school improvement effort. The complex environment and individual situations created challenges for teachers as they struggled to determine how they should approach the AISI school improvement project.

In the interviews, teachers identified a number of consistent themes within their personal and professional lives that influenced their understanding and participation in the AISI school improvement initiative. Their responses have been organized into a set of major themes where most or all the teachers interviewed identified an area directly or indirectly.

One theme that emerged from the study was how the participants understood Earl and Lee's (1998) concept of the urgency-energy-agency cycle of school change. A second theme emerged around how the participants understood AISI itself and the influence this had on them. Third, participants identified goal focus and leadership and its effect on them and their actions throughout the project. Professional development was a significant theme for all participants as they reflected and described their experiences. The participants' understanding of their learning community was a theme that evolved throughout the project and became more significant in the final year of the AISI project. The theme of balance permeated the discussions of all participants in varying degrees from the outset of the AISI project. Finally, changes in practice and changes for future AISI practice are the two final themes that emerged from the discussions of the participants.

A briefer section near the conclusion of this chapter reflects the two minor themes that arose from two participants. First was the moral dilemma experienced by teachers, and second, the significance of the role of the AISI coordinator.

Urgency-Energy-Agency

The teachers in the Manitoba School Improvement Project identified the urgency-energy-agency cycle as the most significant theme in their project (Earl and Lee, 1998). All teachers have a sense of urgency regarding a concern or issue within their classroom, practice or school and this sense of urgency is fueled by energy and, potentially, leads to some action or agency. The agency or action renews the energy and the cycle continues to fuel itself as teachers begin to see themselves as successful and empowered agents of change (Earl and Lee, 1998, p. vi). Reviewing this cyclical process, Fullan (1998) suggests that when the cycle unfolds without any agency, the fragile cycle can quickly deteriorate into cynicism and influence teacher attitudes negatively toward future school improvement initiatives. Thus teachers can be left with a sense of urgency countered by significant reluctance or resistance to undertake any future endeavors.

Teachers in the study at Central Elementary School also demonstrated an overwhelming sense of urgency to meet the needs of their students. Each participant identified either the specific needs of one student in the classroom, or the broader needs of the entire class which they taught. As described in Chapter four, each of the participants manifested a high sense of moral purpose and need to make a difference for students they taught.

Equally persistent as the sense of urgency was a significant level of scepticism and cynicism about the AISI initiative based on the success or lack of success of prior improvement efforts. Shirley, Bev, Jill and Bill described a school initiative with student writing folders. Each student was given a writing folder that would be maintained from grade to grade with writing samples added from each grade. Bill noted and others nodded agreement that it had worked well to start with, but as the initiative progressed, he had opened folders and found that there had been no writing samples added for two years. Leland added that the folders were still around but there was no consistency in terms of the materials inserted. Previous attempts at school wide change had not been sustained.

Staff described a range of sentiments including ambivalence, cynicism and hope as they reflected upon their introduction to AISI. Leland, a relative newcomer to the school and teaching profession, was more ambivalent at the outset of the AISI initiative and more optimistic and excited in the latter year and an half of the project.

> At the beginning of the year we had a staff meeting and it was mentioned to us about this AISI funding and at that time, I think along with a lot of other staff members, we didn't have any idea what AISI was. Okay sure, we got these dollars coming into the school – great, but we had no idea what it was all about.
>
> (In the second year) There was a group of people talking about it and deciding where we would go and I think that's what helps. I think that helped energize the staff because the staff started to realize we can make some of these decisions. We have a say in what goes on. (Leland)

Shirley and Bev also shared a degree of ambivalence as they reflected on how involvement in AISI could influence their current workload and how prior experiences with government project funding influenced current practice.

I was interested, definitely it was. I don't think I resented it as much, but it was just – this is one more thing that I needed to do and I was new here. Here it was "Wow, we are actually doing something that is going to impact the school and make a difference." So I was quite gung ho to do that. They were very time-consuming and they took a lot of recesses. I think that year I became more overwhelmed with student needs and that was when more of the other things went on the back burner. An author came and he was like an injection of fuel again into the writing just more on a personal level in the classroom. It was no longer the whole school thing that I was concerned about. (Shirley)

You know year one I don't think any of us as teachers got what this was. It was this new project that was coming out, from the government and there was a fair amount of cynicism because it was like "Oh yeah we have access to all this money." We weren't really told what the direction or the purpose was. We didn't as a staff, have that understanding of where we were going with this and so we sort of felt like "Yeah we have heard this before." This is the new rah, rah, rah and we just get into it and oops the money is gone, and but you still have all these expectations that we want you to do because you signed up for this. (Bev)

Bill and Jill were openly cynical regarding AISI, its directions and promises for funding.

As far as I was concerned, we have a lump sum of money for one year. Yeah, it is supposed to be a three-year project, but until the money comes in the second year, I am not counting on the second year, until the money comes in the third year we're not counting on the third year. We have got this amount of money, now we will approach this, as to what we can do this year. (Bill)

At the AISI conference and I have got to tell you when we were there, because it's like Alberta Government, and it was you know like, free coffee, free food, you know you can have all the little pastries you want and the camera crews are there. You can tell it's obviously not a convention of teachers, because it's just very political and I think that if we got rid of some of the politics in the education system, we would be a lot better off. Because ultimately it gets down to little Johnny sitting in the classroom and he cannot read. We need Johnny to read. Let's let Johnny read. You know I understand that they are doing that because it's a big deal, we want this funding to continue and we want all our head representatives there because we want this funding to

> continue. But by the same token, I am thinking Johnny is not reading over here. (Jill)

A sense of hope and optimism began to emerge as staff moved into the second year. Staff began to accept the fact that AISI was going to continue beyond a single year as opportunities for professional development continued and resources were made available to the school. While staff reflected a level of urgency and had made some commitment to the writing committee and scheduling of professional development opportunities, the loss of the vice principal leading the project in the spring of the first year of the project created a rudderless environment where no one was quite sure of the direction. This was a critical period, as the project could easily have died and become one more initiative that did not quite reach its intended outcome.

It was not until the beginning of the second year when Jill and Bev were invited to a division level meeting on literacy that a renewed sense of urgency and energy with agency began to develop. Their efforts began to receive support by the division AISI Coordinator both in terms of ideas as well as financial resources. A realization began to develop that agency or action was beginning to materialize and a sense of hope was beginning to develop. Meaningful changes were beginning to occur.

> I am supposed to come to this meeting and I am not sure what my purpose is. It went from that to learning about balanced literacy and then thinking this is so great and it has such potential for improving in our school, why are we not doing this with everybody? Why is it the four of us that are learning about this and using it in our classroom and doing these things and hit and miss going back and saying to other people, you know I found out this neat thing and maybe they have time

> to listen to you and maybe they don't. So Jill and I got further into the balanced literacy stuff. (Bev)

The emergence of Bev and Jill's energy and optimism renewed Central Elementary School's commitment to focus on writing and scheduling professional development opportunities for the staff. The writing committee members of the AISI project in year one had developed a direction for the school. However with the loss of the key people who led the committee part way through year one, the members welcomed the infusion of new ideas from Bev and Jill. Simultaneously in the second year, the division AISI Coordinator also met with the staff and indicated to them that they should be acquiring resources to support their initiative. Bev's response describes this critical moment and the response by the principal.

> Yeah, right they will never buy all this stuff for us – they are not going to – we have heard this before – oh yeah this is great – until we go and say we want this, this and this and then they say "Nope, sorry we don't have the money" and the AISI Coordinator said "You make a list and we will get it for you" and I laughed and said "Okay I'll make you a list" and by God the principal did. So there was some sense of that when people sort of sat back and thought right, sure, we can and then when it happened, then you buy into it because you are forced to believe in it because it actually happened. (Bev)

The agency - purchasing of resources - created a renewal of the cycle and with successive iterations of the renewed energy – agency cycle, staff developed a deeper sense of the possibilities within AISI and commitment to continue their efforts. Leland describes the resulting enthusiasm and energy as he reflects on the last year and half of the AISI project.

> The second year I went there (AISI Conference). We had staff members that were presenting some of our projects, but I was taken there to take a look at other things that were happening. When you go to one of those AISI conferences, it is a very different feel than a lot of

> other conferences that I have been to. I have been to Special Education conferences or Teachers Conventions and the feel was just far different. There were people that were just excited about learning and what they are doing. They wanted to showcase it, and it was electric in there. I can't think of a better term to describe it. You walked in for twenty minutes as a person is describing something that's happening in their school. Ten years ago I was in high school, but I don't think that you would see that. I didn't see it five years ago in school, people were self contained in their classrooms and we didn't find out a lot of the great things that teachers were doing out there and that is the one thing that AISI did. Having the AISI conference where people can share those ideas and share the growth and share what they are doing in their classrooms. Quite often you go to convention and talk to people but there was just the excitement that was there. You saw the enthusiasm on everybody's face as you walked around the Westin where all these displays were. It was incredible and more so in the third year where two of our staff members that were doing the balanced literacy were there. They couldn't believe it, they came back from that and their excitement level had jumped to a whole new level. (Leland)

While the quotation portrays the significance of the AISI conference, it also highlights the growing energy that was developing within Central Elementary School and school divisions across Alberta. As Bill had noted earlier, there was a sense that AISI was meaningful, and there was a commitment beyond an annual announcement of revenue for schools to focus on the urgent needs identified by teachers in their schools. Bev sums it up with this comment.

> I think that any time you as a teacher get excited about a new idea or improve your teaching practice you reflect on your role as a teacher and all of my role as a teacher, to not just guide them academically, but to be a moral and social influence on my kids and so AISI has given me another opportunity to do that. (Bev)

It is evident from Bev's comments that she developed a renewed commitment to her moral purpose as a teacher and making a difference in the lives of children.

There is a greater sense of hope in her voice after having participated in the AISI conference in contrast to her initial ambivalence towards AISI.

The opportunities to purchase resources and the attendance of the AISI conference contributed to the staff's growing sense that AISI was not a passing event and with this emerged a growing sense of hope and possibilities.

Despite a positive change in attitude towards the AISI projects by some, specific concerns remained for others. Bill, the most senior of staff interviewed, still remained cynical in his attitude towards Alberta Learning, AISI and the intended purpose of AISI.

> I don't think they have a clue. I really don't. I don't know whose brainchild this was you know and that may be a very good thing. I think in our school if we had simply been given that money as a budgetary item, much of the money would have been spent the way it's been spent. You know, it wouldn't have changed a whole lot. I don't see AISI as any miraculous kind of program, I just see it business as usual, and we are doing some things that we have money to do which we would do anyway if we had the money to do it. (Bill)

The concern regarding funding was also expressed by Jill who was very involved with the Telus Learning projects. Her concern stemmed from technology funding formulas that required matching funds to be spent by divisions and individual schools. She expressed the lack of trust Alberta Learning had for school divisions and teachers when came it to managing funds and projects given the imposed guidelines and accountability measures for school improvement initiatives. From her perspective, each dollar appeared to come with a string attached.

> What the government does is says we'll give you money, but you have to put in proposals and do your accountability – you have to be accountable for these dollars and we want to see this and this and this and that you can only spend it in this way. So rather than saying you

> are a group of professionals, decide what would make the biggest impact in your school, we trust you, run ahead and just go with it – its like it has to be in these areas, so they say we are going to give this amount of money to education but it is only for computer technology. But it is only for hardware if you match it. So now all of a sudden, we can get $20,000 but we have to come up with $20,000 of our own. We have to purchase all the software and we now have to pay people to install that and we have to hire techs and we have to in-service our staff and all that comes out of our own pocket. Thanks very much for that $20,000. (Jill)

In conjunction with the scepticism about funding arrangements, there was also a sense that schools and teachers were being told to improve their practice and this was a source of resentment for Jill, given her ongoing commitment to learning and professional growth she has demonstrated throughout her career. While all teachers reflected the need for school improvement to be local in its orientation and flexible enough to meet individual teachers' needs there was unanimity that a top down directed approach did not reflect a trust and confidence in the profession. Jill and Bill perceived the approach taken by the Provincial government as a "deficit model" where "teachers are deficient in some way and they need to be fixed in the direction being promoted by some professional development program (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000, p. 42).

While it was clear that concerns remained, teachers were beginning to develop a renewed sense of energy. Although the urgency-energy-agency cycle may be fragile, it was evident that the AISI experience had created an opportunity to re-engage teachers in school improvement efforts even for Bill who was at the end of his teaching career. It is also apparent that while teachers have begun to accept AISI and become active participants in school improvement, Bill and Jill continued to be wary

of the program based on their historical experiences with the provincial government. For them, longer-term commitments will be required to develop a deeper trust and acceptance of initiatives such as AISI. While Jill, in particular, recognizes the need for "politics" in order to ensure funding continues, both she and Bill bear a degree of resentment that AISI presents a degree of imposition on them as professionals determining the appropriate goals for their students and school. The rest have begun to incorporate AISI as part of their teaching roles at Central Elementary School.

Each of the teachers has demonstrated individual thresholds for his or her acceptance of AISI and the activities undertaken at the school. It is evident that the historical perspective of each of the teachers has a direct influence upon his or her readiness to engage in school improvement activities with each of the teachers requiring a degree of proof or trial period before developing a sense of trust and ownership in the project. Fullan (1998) and Earl and Lee (1998) recognize that the cycle can quickly spiral into cynicism and is unique to each teacher's personal pathway. Earl and Lee (1998) recognize that it is important to work through the cycle in order to create some positive change or agency in order to renew teacher energy and commitment. This renewal is essential to "unleash the energy within" (Earl and Lee, 1998, p. 72) that each teacher brings with his or her moral purpose.

Understanding AISI

Hargreaves (2003) argues that teachers and schools are part of the complex changing world he calls the learning society and he goes on to identify three critical conditions to function effectively. First it comprises an expanded educational sphere, second, it involves complex ways of processing and circulating knowledge and

information, and third, basic changes must be made to the way organizations create systems, teams and cultures (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 17). All teachers spoke consistently about the positive impact of professional development opportunities and the benefits of sharing ideas with teachers from across the continent and province. They also identified a lack of communications with little understanding about AISI. Later in this chapter, we will discuss how teachers attempted to reorganize their community and culture as part of their efforts to realize the goals of their AISI project. Critically the three conditions that Hargreaves (2003) describes are present however, they each appear in varying stages of development and have evolved in varying degrees throughout the project.

Upon her arrival at Central Elementary School Shirley commented, "I had no real sense of what AISI was." This sentiment is consistent with others.

> You know year one I don't think any of us as a teachers got what this was. I don't remember hearing anything about it until that first year. Now, I think that we have a clearer understanding of where we are going with this although I don't get where the jurisdiction is doing it. I am not at the jurisdiction level so I don't understand about all those forms and stuff where she (AISI Coordinator) is saying she does this. Sometimes at a jurisdictional level I don't know if there is full understanding. (Bev)

> So people don't really have an understanding of what advantage that could be or how powerful that could be, so it is really kind of hit and miss in my opinion and people really don't understand AISI at all. The money is centralized. I think probably that the people that have the best understanding of AISI are those individual teachers that were at that conference. Look what I can do with my class because of this project money. They have the best understanding of AISI. (Jill)

> Understanding of AISI still wasn't solid. To this date (April 14, 2004) we have a number of individuals that wouldn't understand. I wouldn't even guess at a percentage that understands what AISI is. (Leland)

Understanding AISI and its outcomes continued to be an issue over the duration of the project. While those teachers directly involved in organizing and attending AISI conferences began to develop an insight into AISI and the possibilities it held for them and their students, in general, staff did not have a clear understanding of the expectations associated with outcomes and reporting. As Jill noted earlier, the AISI Coordinator handled the forms and reporting. The school provided data accounting for professional development activities and purchases and perceptions regarding benefits for students and teachers. The AISI Coordinator recorded PAT scores as measures of growth.

The greatest gain in understanding the purposes and possibilities of AISI appears to have come from the opportunity to attend the annual AISI conference. Once people attended they began to understand AISI and realize that other teachers, schools and divisions were engaged in similar as well as very different activities. The contagious energy Leland described above acted as a catalyst for teachers to engage and commit more time and energy to the activities that could be realized through AISI. Teachers attending the conference developed trust in the purposes of AISI. This resulted in a growing realization of the benefits that could be realized from an AISI project and, in turn strengthened teachers' commitment to their school improvement initiative.

The attendance by staff at the annual AISI conference and international conferences provided the opportunity to expand the educational sphere for teachers at Central Elementary School. They also began to develop different pathways within the school to communicate with the principal, other teachers and the staff as

a whole. Their identity as a team and a learning community also began to emerge as an area of concern in the third year of the project.

Goal Focus and Leadership

> Solutions must come through the development of shared meaning. The interface between individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls (Fullan, 2001, p. 9).

Clarity in goal focus is essential for achieving sustained change or improvement and in the absence of a clear vision and purpose, changes in practices tend to be temporary and efforts to improve are often met with short-term gains followed by a quick return to past practice (Senge, 2000) (Fritz, 1996). Clarity of purpose is realized by recognizing the structural tension between the existing state and preferred state and defining in detail the nature of the preferred state. "Organizations that are unclear about what they are attempting to accomplish will not be able to create structural tension. They will be burdened with structural conflicts as the dominant structure, and they will find themselves in patterns of chronic oscillation (Fritz, 1996, p. 186).

Without the focus on the preferred state or goal, actions or strategies can simply become one more initiative that has been tried with no sense if the goal has been accomplished. For teachers at Central Elementary School structural tension existed between the actual performance on the writing portion of the Provincial Achievement Tests and the preferred goal that anticipated more students achieving a standard of excellence. When asked however they were not able to articulate the percentage of students they wished to see in the standard of excellence or specific

indicators to gauge the effect of their efforts. Their goal did not have a degree of specificity such that they could identify when they had reached it.

As Fullan (2001) suggests, leadership is required to assist in articulating the goal or vision and provide direction to the improvement initiative. It was evident for teachers involved in the AISI project that clarity of focus and leadership were significant elements in the success or failure of their project.

Improving writing skills had been an ongoing focus at Central Elementary School. While the staff was generally satisfied with student achievement in other subject areas, there was a sense that their students could do better in the area of writing. As Shirley explains, "They had looked at the achievement test results that were consistently just in the average range and it was their goal to move more students up to the standard of excellence." Bev also points out that long before AISI had arrived, the school established goals for improvement in reading and writing.

When AISI arrived in the fall of 2000 an AISI committee was established and in conjunction with school administration it was determined that a focus on writing would be appropriate for the school's AISI project. Throughout the interview teachers referred to this committee as the writing committee. However, when the teachers were asked to speak to their plan, they were unable to articulate the measures they would use to gauge improvement in writing, or establish how they hoped to improve students' exam scores. Jill who was not initially on the writing committee had no understanding at all and indicated that beyond the committee, people were not aware of any of the discussions or goals.

The project was initially led by the vice principal who had the vision for the project. However the vice principal transferred out of the school in spring of 2001 and this caused teachers in the project to reflect on two elements. They questioned their goal focus and also wondered who would assume the leadership in the project. Jill describes the scenario.

> When we set up writing, we set up the writing committee. There was a group of teachers that were kind of responsible for doing the PD. The vice principal had the vision and it's like this is the path we are kind of going to take. Then the committee was like okay, they were all on board. We are following along – here is the road. Then when the vice principal left, there wasn't anybody that picked up that vision is my impression. So as somebody that wasn't on that committee that first year, I kind of have no idea what their plan was, what their path was that they are following. (Jill)

Up to the vice principal's departure, writing committee members were expected to provide direction and organize professional development at the school. The principal's role, as Bev describes it, "Was sort of the money guy. You can go to this international conference and the broader peripheral stuff that went in to that committee."

The primary strategy of the school improvement project was identification of best practices in writing. In the first year, a writing consultant was hired from Calgary. In the latter part of the year, it became clear that the writing consultant they had hoped to hire would not be available until the third year of AISI. With the leader and vision gone, and their first choice for professional development not available until a year later, teachers were unsure what would happen next.

The uncertainty and anxiety these conditions produced was evident in the focus group interview. Staff were more reluctant to comment on how the project went in the first year, struggled to remember the name of the presenter, and their body language suggested an air of exhaustion and defeat. Most of the group was slumped over and leaning on the table. Expressions were generally flat and there was no sign of enthusiasm or excitement in either the tone of the language or body language.

Leland's reflection on the departure of the vice principal highlighted another element that the rest of the group did not articulate. He perceived that the vice principal's exit produced benefits to staff and the project that otherwise may not have been realized. With other staff members having to come forward and take on a leadership role he believed this actually strengthened the project.

> I think it helped that it was coming from staff members. I feel with any staff you have some social connections and smaller groups and I feel that we had individuals from different groups that were leaders. We trust the people on staff to lead us and I think that helped rather than coming top down. We were having our own staff say, "This is a focus we would like to have." Try this out. (Leland)

In the beginning of the second year two new leaders began to emerge from the staff. Bev and Jill attended a balanced literacy planning session and began to develop a new plan that included both writing and balanced literacy. Bev was responsible for division one teachers and Jill for division two. The new vice principal did not take on the role of the predecessor and the principal continued to play more of the manager role shepherding external professional development experiences.

As the unofficial leadership team, Bev and Jill approached their new roles with enthusiasm and commitment. Staff did not always welcome Jill's passion for balanced literacy.

> I talked about AISI and balanced literacy so much people were actually avoiding me in the hallways. They would see me walking down the hallways towards them and they would cut through the library to avoid me. Every staff meeting that we had, you know AISI was on the agenda. Balanced literacy was on the agenda because I wanted something else and so yeah; it's a lot of talking. (Jill)

Jill and Bev began to develop a different vision in the second year of the project. As Bev points out, she and Jill understood where they wanted it to go and in spite of presentations at staff meetings and ordering materials they were never sure if all staff understood or supported the direction. While Bev and Jill developed the clarity of purpose that Senge (2000) and Fritz (1996) observe as essential, they also began to expand their means of communications and operations to develop the teams and culture that were lacking at the onset of the project that were also identified as essential by Hargreaves (2003) for affecting change.

Fritz (1996) highlights a critical step in the change in the leadership and goal focus at Central Elementary. The change in goal focus appears to have changed as the leadership has changed and with that the leadership has brought with it a set of priorities or problems to be solved. While each of the problems, writing and balanced literacy, may be valid causes driven by moral purpose, Fritz highlights the need to question whether we are engaging in problem solving or clarification of the bigger purpose, our vision.

> Clearly chronic problem solving within an organization demonstrates a lack of essential planning and organizational control. Of course,

> organizations do have problems and do need to deal with them well. But the better designed the business is, the less likely it will be that problem solving is its primary orientation (Fritz, 1996, p. 51).

The change from a focus on writing to balanced literacy, which involves both reading and writing, appears to encompass a broader vision for the school over all grades. This shift moved the AISI project away from problem solving and closer to a broader vision or preferred state for the entire school that Fritz (1996) identifies as a critical step in order to achieve sustained change as opposed to oscillating behavior.

Jill and Bev undertook efforts to bring in resources and materials for staff to review in the second and third year. Interested teachers used AISI funds to purchase resources for their classroom. Jill and Bev believed staff needed an opportunity to see for themselves the possibilities that they had already realized through their own involvement in the AISI project. Jill described how they stressed the importance of teachers taking ownership of their participation. Both women took the time to address teachers individually about balanced literacy and connections to existing practices.

> We approached staff individually. So you would be sitting in the staff room thinking that you were going to relax and enjoy yourself and I would come and sit right beside you and say "You know we are thinking of bringing in this program and it has these components in reading and these components in writing – are you interested?" And I had some staff that said, "Well I already do a lot of that. That sounds like what I already do." I said, "Would you like new resources to do it? Would you like some new books?" And they said "Sure". (Bev)

For Bev, this provision of choice was critical for teacher empowerment. Teachers were given choices on how they could teach and resources they could use.

> I think they truly feel that it is the one place where they have empowerment. They have the right to say with nobody judging them, or saying, "you are a bad teacher, you are not part of, you are not working with us, because you said you won't do any boards." They can say, "I don't like these books. I don't like this. I am not comfortable with throwing this all out." And we go – "fine". So maybe for them, that is the one positive that is there and they are more willing to buy in because that is the one place where they feel like it doesn't matter what else is going on. I'm a voice that's heard and I think that comes because it is largely teacher driven. Administration stays out of it as much as they can, other than to say, yep, here's the dollars. (Bev)

While providing teachers an opportunity to voice their preferences and develop a sense of empowerment were primary concerns for Bev and Jill, they also recognized that providing choice also meant accepting that not all would participate. Not all teachers identified the same resources they viewed as preferable and this was accepted.

In addition to providing choice and encouraging participation, they attempted to identify and build on existing practices within their school. Their approach began to develop momentum.

> You want people to see the value of it and you want them to buy in. But we have got a lot of teachers with a lot of experience in a lot of different areas and they're master teachers. They have strategies and teaching methods that have worked for them throughout the years and we want to really show them how balanced literacy can be incorporated. The best part of our in-service was as a group discussing our feelings about the spelling program. Is this really meeting our students' needs? And if it is not, and we felt that it really wasn't meeting our students' needs, then how can we change things so that it is meeting our students' needs? What do we want to see happen? What is currently happening? How can we get there? (Jill)

When staff members suggested that they were "already doing some of that", Bev and Jill acknowledged the assertion and attempted to demonstrate how the new

program could take their existing practice and extend it to meet even more student needs.

> We have staff that had been teaching over 30 years and when they do novel studies, they have already got three different levels of books and not everybody does the same novel study and right there they are already helping their kids. So guided reading refines that a bit and you actually assign levels. But basically they are already doing it and I think it was really important to say to teachers "We already know that you do. I had one teacher who said, "Yes" came back the next day, said "No" because he said "You mean I have to read five novels?" I said that they are pretty short. He says "Well I don't think I can do that" Then he comes back the next day and says, "You know I was thinking about it. Yeah I think that I want to try it". And then the next year a third of the staff was switched. In September, we don't even know who we should ask at this point. I said do you want in or out, but if you want out that's fine. And we told them that at the beginning too. If you don't want to do this, that's fine. Everybody chose to stay in. Even though the fact that they had brand new curriculums and you know some people had been used to teaching a certain grade for quite a long time and now it's like you are teaching this sort of thing and they were still all in. (Bev)

Bev and Jill provided the option for staff to participate and continued to reinforce this notion because they recognized the existing workloads and new grades teachers had assumed that year.

Bev highlighted a concern regarding leadership and communication within the school and division and the influence it had on her approach as the informal leader with AISI. She recognized that all decisions were not easy to make and stressed the importance of communicating the rationale behind decisions to avoid potential problems.

> I look at our staff and I see the potential that is there and then I see some of the decisions that are made or the way that decisions are communicated and I see the staff needlessly in turmoil about decisions

> that are made. When you feel like things have been done to you and you don't understand why, and you don't understand the philosophy behind it and you don't feel you can communicate how you feel about that without fear of retribution, you can't be excited. I look at our school and I think you kind of got cross-purposes here sometimes. The intentions are good and if those intentions were actually clearly communicated – there wouldn't be the sense that this is being done to me. It would be okay, I don't like this necessarily, but I can understand why it has to happen. If I am never communicated why it has to happen, all I get is this bad thing has been done to me. So then you have that resistance to anything that is brought down to the school level and it just seems like we go along and we are okay. We just start to come out of it and wham we are hit with another big one and then I think that something like AISI where you can see the potential and you see what could be done if everybody was working together and wasn't fighting those outside things. (Bev)

Bev's comments highlight the elements of tension and resistance expressed by Jill and Bill and the fallout from the historical lack of communication within the school and division. While this is only the perspective of the teachers interviewed, it is evident that the inability to share viewpoints and opinions openly had had far reaching effects. There is also a sense from the comments that teachers wished to move on and develop a community of optimism where teachers could realize the potential of AISI and be free of the socio-political elements that had detracted in the past. Their efforts to communicate with and involve staff members exemplified this desire.

While most of the group did not express concerns about leadership once the group entered into the second year of the project, Bev expressed a desire for her principal to play a greater role beyond authorizing expenditures. As she perceived it, the formal leadership the principal could provide would add more authority to the project and perhaps the project would gain greater momentum and direction when it

was perceived as having the principal's direct engagement and support. She qualified her comment by noting that it was not an expression of discontent with the current practice, but rather that she could see the potential benefits of having the principal more involved. She expressed the kinds of supports the principal has provided.

> But if we can show him why we need something, he gives it to us and he has been really good about it. That was one of the things that we felt really strongly about when we went to him and said, "We need to do this as a staff – you cannot add this on top of it. You know a lot of teachers have had grade assignment changes in the last year. You can not say to somebody who is doing new curriculum, now you are going to do balanced literacy on top of this with no time to learn how to do it." So we were very strong on this. (Bev)

The desire for more involvement by the principal was countered by the openness of the principal to input. The impression created however was that decisions were made without the kinds of broader consultation that Bev was striving for. Bev's portrayal of the principal's involvement raised more questions about decision making in the school, the degree to which staff were involved in decisions, and the degree to which the principal had a sense of the challenges teachers faced, or alternately his belief in their capacity to do more. A close connection existed between the role of the principal, leadership and goal focus in Central Elementary School. Fullan (2001) observed, "I know of no improving school that doesn't have a principal who is good at leading improvement."(p. 141). In his review of successful principals Fullan makes the following observations on the role and qualities principals must have.

> These successful principals had (1) inclusive, facilitative orientation; (2) an institutional focus on student learning; (3) efficient

> management; and (4) combined pressure and support. They had a strategic orientation, using school improvement plans and instructional focus to attack incoherence. (Fullan, 2001, p. 142).

Senge (2000) identifies the principal as the formal leader responsible for creating the tension between the existing and preferred states within the organization and subsequently creating the goal focus. In the absence of an established goal focus and formal leader, a modified goal focus and new set of leaders emerged in the second year. A focus on writing in the first year of AISI evolved to a broader focus on balanced literacy that included both reading and writing. This shift occurred after the departure of the vice principal and the emergence of leadership by Jill and Bev. The commitment to balanced literacy moved the AISI project ahead and breathed new life into a fading or oscillating initiative. Critically, Bev and Jill's beliefs regarding leadership practices and respect for teachers' decision making influenced their approach and developed ownership and momentum for their ideas and vision of balanced literacy.

Although Bev and Jill modeled the qualities that they wished to see within their school and they complemented those attributes their principal manifested, there continued to be a zone of indecision where a clear connection was not established between the principal, staff and the vision for the school. The shift in goal focus reflected a lack of connection between the goal and the principal. It did however portray a willingness to be open to the suggestions of the staff. As noted earlier by Louis et al. (1994), Barth (1990), Joyce (1991), Reynolds (1999), Proudfoot and Baker (1994), Renihan and Renihan (1994) and Lezotte and Jacoby (1990), collaboration and development of shared meaning are essential for

successful school improvement. A great deal of the tension within the project appears to stem from the need for clarity, shared understanding and leadership to carry forward the shared understanding developed by the staff.

Professional Development

> Professional development is not about workshops and courses; rather it is at its heart the development of habits of learning that are far more likely to be powerful if they present themselves day after day. (Fullan, 2001, p. 253)

Opportunities for professional development were present throughout the AISI project at Central Elementary School. For teachers to change their practices they must have opportunity to be technical learners and develop new skills (Hargreaves, 1994) and this notion is reinforced both in the AISI program outline, (Alberta Learning, 1999a) as well the actions of the school. Elmore and Burney describe successful professional development as:

- Focusing on concrete classroom applications of general ideas;
- Exposing teachers to actual practice rather than descriptions;
- Providing opportunities for group support and collaboration; and
- Involving deliberate evaluation and feedback by skilled practitioners.

(Elmore and Burney, 1999 as quoted in Fullan, 2001, p. 259)

Of all the elements identified by teachers, professional development had the most significant impact in their AISI project. The opportunities for professional development did not seem to have a specific focus initially.

> It sort of felt like, the principal was saying, "You can go to this conference and you can go to this conference" and we had no sense in where this was going and how this was pulling together as a school. It sort of felt piece meal. People were shooting off in all directions and we didn't really have a sense of "this is what we are doing". (Bev)

International professional development included conferences in New York and Florida. Presentations and workshops were made at the school by two writing consultants and an author.

The international professional development opportunities focused primarily on the Fast For Word program that assisted students with learning disabilities in reading and speech. It was included as part of the AISI program to respond to unmet speech and language services within the school community.

Staff responded with scepticism to the professional development opportunities that were made available at the outset of the project. There were questions as to the source of the funds, associated costs and the merits of attending conferences.

> There was a lot of scepticism about why we were spending our money, sending people to conferences and until I went on one, I didn't get it. I thought nothing is coming of this money, these people are going off to these conferences, they are not coming back and saying, here is a program that I am implementing because of this. People were very quiet when they came back other than you might get up at a staff meeting and say "I went to this really great session on such and such" but you didn't talk a lot about how great it was because there was a fair amount of resentment towards it.
>
> Then I went on one and realized that for me as a teacher, tremendous growth, but again, when it is costing you thousands of dollars to send people, is that justifiable as far as the best bang for your buck when it is one teacher instead of a whole school? And I know that the principal's goal was to send everybody and it is really amazing to get to go to one of those and having gone to one I think wow. I hope that everybody will access me, because it is just something that for most people you don't, you will never be able to afford to fly yourself and do hotels and everything on your standard pay. (Bev)

All of the teachers involved in the research spoke highly of the professional development. A consistent response among participants was that it was not until one

participated that one began to realize the value of the experience beyond the development of new skills.

Shirley attended her conference on Fast For Word in New York. This was her first opportunity to fly and longest she had ever been away from her family. The brain research that supported the Fast For Word program also influenced her understanding of how children learned and the implications for her instructional strategies. Educational experiences were enhanced with cultural forays and, while in New York, Shirley attended Phantom of the Opera and Les Miz. She observed that had she not been at the conference, she would not have gone to see these productions.

Shirley identified another benefit for attending. Opportunities to read at the end of the day did not materialize given her the lack of time and energy at the end of the day.

> Honestly if I had to pick up a non-fiction book and try to read it and study it in the evening, I would fall asleep. I can't do it. So it is much better for me to go and listen to the author. (Shirley)

Attending a conference was the most effective way of learning given the constraints on her time and energy. There were no personal or professional commitments at the conference other than to attend and learn.

Bev attended a conference in Florida and expressed the awe she felt attending this conference.

> The IRA conference – so there is like 12,000 people there, all of whom are teachers and you are talking to teachers from all these different places and you feel that sense of part of a larger group and that they have those same issues that I have and they have the same concerns. Yes their government is pushing stuff on them as well. You go to a lot of those sessions and well I'm already doing that. I thought that was what you were supposed to do and they are talking about it like it is some brand new, wow, woo-hoo! You get a sense of affirmation of

> what you are doing. It just rejuvenates you to go to something like that and come back to your kids and be excited. (Bev)

Validation of existing practice, rejuvenation and sense of being part of a bigger discussion common to thousands of others teaching reading and writing were powerful influences for Bev. Although she learned about new literacy practices, the validation and energizing effect of being a part of a bigger discussion were a greater influence on her teaching practise.

Jill's experiences at the AISI conferences were equally influential. Her exposure to division models for school improvement and teachers excited about their AISI projects opened the door to multiple possibilities for her teaching and expanded her vision for potential school and division wide AISI projects.

> We went to the AISI conference and it was like a big light bulb went on over your head. A lot of balanced literacy was that way. We went to see a presentation and it was like boom, everybody was doing balanced literacy. We are in-servicing ones or K-ones in the first year, the next year we are doing twos, the next year we are doing threes, it is done in this way, you will have this many periods or this many days a year. Then there were other sessions that I went to where it was like this one teacher wanted to do this and she got AISI money to do it in her classroom. But the thing was whether it was a division wide decision or not, individual teachers were more exciting to talk to. Because it was theirs – you know. One teacher had a grade one/two split, and she wanted to work with her twos in language. So three times a week in the morning a teacher would come in for the ones and she would get to take her twos. They make signs on paper and then they would cut it out and do stories and do like Leo Leonie kind of pictures with it and have parent nights and she was telling me all about this and showing me the kids' work and she was totally jazzed. Another was a science teacher who liked science and so wanted to take a group of kids to study wind power. He got this AISI money so they could take this field trip. They were somewhere where there was wind power and then the kids came back and they did power point presentations. They were invited to go to the school board and they have done this. It was really cool, because there are a lot of things in teaching that you think, "Oh man wouldn't it be great if we could do

> this?" "Wouldn't it be great if we could go to this place, if we had the materials to do this, if we had the time to do this?" That's the impression that I got more from the individual teachers. The people that were presenting for districts tended to be the coordinator and they are not the one that actually gets to work with the little kids. They are the people that kind of get to crunch the numbers and set up professional development and they are working more with teachers. Where as you get people that are working with little kids and its like "oh this is so cool" kind of thing. So it was really cool, because there were so many projects there and I came back and told my staff "They will give us money! They will give us money!" And when we were talking to the staff about AISI and talking about bringing in materials, the number one questions was where is the money coming from? Is this coming out of instructional budget? What are we going to lose because we want to have these books and where are we cutting back in other areas? And to say to them "You know what? We are not. We are not cutting back in other areas. They will give us money we just have to put a proposal in." The cool thing was the AISI proposal from an urban district. This is their three-year proposal and I am thinking we can do that. (Jill)

Jill returned energized and while the experience may not have changed her practice or technical skills, her understanding of her role and the potential she had as a teacher working with an AISI project had grown exponentially. The effect of seeing the impact a single enthusiastic teacher could have as well as the larger coordinated effort by an entire school jurisdiction is captured in her final comments where she express a confidence and resolution of ability to be able to "do that".

Bill attended the conference in Florida as well as the AISI conferences in Edmonton. Bill reflected a critical consumer approach in the assessment of his experience. While valuing the benefits of Fast For Word and the connection to brain research, he expressed indignation at having to listen to a number of sessions on how to raise money in order to pay for the Fast For Word program. Of the nine sessions he attended four of them focused on fund raising. Despite his reservations about the

focus on fund raising, he was extremely impressed with the quality and caliber of the presenters and their contribution to his learning experience.

> When they were talking about the intellectual underpinnings of the program, these were exciting programs. I mean to have people who are leading researchers in how the brain processes language, which has always been an interest to me, you are just sitting there spell bound. Some of these guys were so knowledgeable and the things they did were incredible. (Bill)

The quality of the experience was significant for Bill for several reasons. The professional growth experience tapped directly into his passion for language and expanded his understanding in an area where he was already actively engaged.

Leland attended the Fast For Word program in New York as well as both AISI conferences. The experience in New York was significant as he reflected on the difference it made for the students he taught. The AISI conference impacted him more dramatically in terms of his historical perceptions of teachers. The energy and excitement that was been generated at the AISI conference as well as upon returning to the school is a characteristic that he has not seen in the profession either as a high school student or teacher in his recent years.

Leland's perception of the AISI conference is consistent with that of the others. Attending this conference was perhaps the most significant professional development activity and event for the entire group. It was a "turning point" for them in terms of understanding their own roles within AISI and the possibilities that existed. If there was scepticism before, it had all but dissipated for this group of teachers. Jill's excited comment; "They will give us the money!" represented a

significant shift for her. Given her leadership role, this pivotal point had significant influence on the entire project.

During the focus group activity the changes in body language and animated discussion began to change simultaneously with the discussion of the AISI conference. A heightened level of energy and animation in voice and posture was evident in everyone. A brief pause by one member was a cue for another to jump into the conversation even if the individual was merely pausing to reframe his or her thoughts. Throughout all of the interviews, it was evident that this was pivotal and significant turning point in the project.

While the professional development activities organized by Central Elementary School may not have met all of the conditions identified by Elmore and Burney (1999 as quoted in Fullan, 2001), they did meet three of the four criteria for successful professional development opportunities. They focused on classroom applications and exposed teachers to actual practice especially in the annual AISI conference. Third, staff tended to participate in groups or, at minimum, in pairs. There was no evidence or mention of evaluation of professional development opportunities with the exception of Bill's reflections on the fund raising sessions. The annual AISI conference became a powerful catalyst for teachers with its focus on teachers actively engaged in action research and school improvement. Their practice, beliefs and renewed commitment were influenced significantly by this conference as they were encouraged and inspired by the agency of other teachers who had become successful agents of change within their own schools. Jill's observation of "We can do that" captures this critical influence that the annual AISI conference had.

Learning Community

The professional development experiences deepened the understanding of AISI and created a broader set of connections with teachers across Alberta and North America as well as the combinations of teachers who attended these experiences. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) note that opportunities for teachers to work together, learn from each other and improve their expertise as a community are critical for schools as they set out on the school improvement journey. Collaboration and development of shared meaning are essential. Alberta Learning (1999 a) also identified collaboration as a significant component in the AISI improvement projects. Sergiovanni (1994) also finds a need for community in our schools. "Community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort" (1994, p. xi) because:

> Community is the tie that binds students and teachers together in special ways, to something more significant than themselves: shared values and ideals. It lifts both teachers and students to higher levels of self-understanding, commitment, and performance – beyond the reaches of the shortcomings and difficulties they face in their everyday lives. Community can help teachers and students be transformed from a collection of "I's" to a collective "we," thus providing them with a unique and enduring sense of identity, belonging, and place (1994, p. xiii).

Several key descriptors put forth by the teachers describe their school learning community. They were a mature staff of master teachers, communication from school and division administration needed improvement, grade level communications were strong, communications among the participants was open and genuine, and there was a sense that if one spoke out at a staff meeting or in a group of teachers there may be negative consequences. The resolve and commitment by teachers to improve their

practice and meet student needs was growing. However, shared understanding of a common goal focus, shared values and beliefs had not manifested themselves at any point throughout the discussions. A collective "we" had not emerged within the context of the goals and understanding of the school's AISI project or the school community.

Bev and Jill have spoken to the opportunities that staff had to opt in or out on materials purchased for their literacy program. This deliberate choice was made in response to the top-down approach used in the past where teachers were told what to do and expected to do as they were told.

> In the past people definitely felt like we were told that this is the new direction and this is the way we are going to do it and you had better sound like you are doing it and you had better sound like you like it or you are perceived as a negative force in our school. (Bev)

Discussions about the efficacy of the spelling program resulted in a staff decision to not purchase particular resources and rethink their approach. A sense of ownership and empowerment were created through discussion and optional participation.

> I have seen greater empowerment of our teachers and less fear to say, "Yeah, this is a great program, but this part of it is not going to work for me." It doesn't feel like somebody telling me you have to do this, it feels like me wanting to do this so I get to say whether making words is going to work. Nobody is saying you have to do all of this. Nobody is saying if you want to be part of the balanced literacy team in our school you have to sign on for everything. If you don't like the materials, don't use them. Find something that you like and we will get that for you. So there is less feeling of I can't say anything about this because if I do I am perceived as being a bad teacher or a backwards teacher, or not willing to go with the flow. I can still buy into balanced literacy and say "You know what? I teach grade six and making words is not appropriate for them." We are looking at best practices, so you have to take the best from everything and best for

you is still doing this part of what you used to do, then you do that. (Jill)

The amount of time available at staff meetings, multiple understandings taken away from the meetings and scepticism of the group warranted a different approach. Jill approached staff individually regarding participation and trust was built one teacher at a time.

The opportunities for staff to discuss philosophies or materials to be used across the school were minimal and on a broader level there was a reluctance bordering on fear of repercussions for speaking out.

> Beyond the literacy project into broader issues on staff there is reluctance on the part of staff to speak. I don't know if there is a sense within our school, if I disagree with something that we are doing as a school, I can speak out without damage to my self. (Bev)

For Jill, a similar need existed to have teachers enter into an open discussion and dialogue about their practices. These discussions were essential in order to learn from others and provide encouragement to colleagues within the school.

> I don't know, maybe I just have rose-colored glasses, but I think you know for people who say, "Well I do that", well good one on you! I don't have a problem with that at all. If you have been working leveled books for last 15 years that just indicates that you are a master teacher and you should celebrate that. I think, you know this teacher that I was talking about and how he does making words, I think that's brilliant. I think that we should say, "You know what that is a brilliant idea!" I might not do that in my classroom, but that is a great idea. I think as teachers, everybody has got their own experiences and their own reflections, and you know even the class you have will determine what you are doing. I would love to see teachers walk in and say "This is what I do with making words" and everybody say "Wow, that's so cool!" and I do this and this doesn't work and why doesn't this work and how do you do this? Like handing out those cards takes so long, how do you do it kind of thing? I would love for teachers to

> dialogue and say, "This is what I am doing. This is how it is working." and they don't have to be happy about it. They can say "this isn't working – I was doing this momentum thing and its way too hard" and that would be even more beneficial cause then other colleagues can say, "Oh I've tried this, I've done this" like that would be perfect. Wouldn't that be perfect if we had that kind of dialogue? (Jill)

Within the group there was a sense that these kind of discussions were beginning to occur but on a limited basis at specific grade levels or groups of staff. Of all the teachers interviewed, Jill and Bev articulated the urgency and need most strongly to move their school ahead in this direction.

For Jill and Bev it was evident that they viewed the literacy project as an opportunity to change not only the approach to balanced literacy, but also the learning community in terms of the way the staff interacted, viewed each other and developed a sense of shared ownership.

The degree to which each of the participants expressed a need for a learning community was varied. However, all of the teachers spoke to the need for everyone to be on the "same page" when implementing their AISI project and capacity to discuss issues as a staff.

Much like any classroom, the staff at Central Elementary School had a diversity of teacher learners, and, as is the case in a classroom, diversity can be perceived as either a strength or a challenge. As learners, they manifested differing levels of needs for developing a shared understanding within their staff as a whole. Jill and Bev both commented how they created a balance between the two of them

as leaders. Jill identified the task and outcomes and Bev let her know how the identified task and outcomes should be completed or if the staff were ready for it.

An assumption in AISI as proposed by Alberta Learning (1999) is that teachers, principals and division level administrators have the capacity to collaborate and function as a learning community. Within Central Elementary School, Bev and Jill have observed that smaller groups have developed trust and ability to work together effectively. At the staff level as Jill pointed out, staff meetings were not places to share information and the ability to speak freely without repercussion did not exist. While individual skill sets may have been present, a working learning model for the entire group to dialogue, create shared understandings and outcomes, and develop a greater sense of a learning community had either not been identified or articulated in order for the group to move forward.

It appears that given the comments of the teachers, a need existed to develop a greater understanding of the elements of a learning community. While AISI has provided a general set of expectations in terms of roles and outcomes, it is evident from Central Elementary School's experience that the ability of the staff to act as a learning community is in a state of growth. Under Jill and Bev's leadership, the staff has begun to develop trust and participate more actively in sharing and decision-making within the context of the balanced literacy project. Bev's confidence and trust in her relationship with the principal appears to have grown with her ability to influence the decisions of the principal. She has attempted to influence the principal's decision-making and communication skills and align them with the practices she and Jill have used when working with the staff.

Bev's actions also highlight Sergiovani's (1994) attributes of a learning community. Along with the rest of the teachers interviewed she has manifested a deep sense of moral purpose and to that end attempted to influence the direction of the principal and the school toward a learning community model. Fullan (2001) connects the importance of improvement or change and peer relationships in schools.

> Change involves learning to do something new, and interaction is the primary basis for social learning. New meanings, new behaviors, new skills and new beliefs depend significantly on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals or are exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work. The quality of working relationships among teachers is strongly related to implementation. Collegiality, open communication, trust, support and help, learning on the job, getting results, and job satisfaction and morale are closely interrelated. (Fullan, 2001, p. 84).

Both Bev and Jill have expressed the desire to move on and beyond the negative experiences in the past and to create a new mental model for themselves, their staff students and community. They had begun to develop a new vision for a learning community built on the values of trust, collegiality and acceptance of the personal paths that each of the teachers involved in the project are on. The acceptance and trust is reflected in the option to participate and willingness to recognize the individual circumstances each of the teachers are in and how that might reflect their decision to either opt in or opt out of all or parts of the literacy project. There was a sense of openness and safety as the teachers were not reluctant to speak out in the focus group and all supported their colleagues within the individual interviews.

Balance

> AISI is wonderful, but teachers are learners and they do want to do the best for the kids. But they need the time and the resources to do it. They need to have a manageable load to do it with. Make sure that people that you are asking to do these projects can keep a balance in their life, a balance in their work life. It's not that they don't want to do them, it's that they need to be able to manage it. (Shirley)

Shirley's comments highlight the dilemma teachers and leaders face in education. Fink in his presentation at the 2004 National Staff Development Council Conference in Vancouver, B.C. shared a quotation on leadership from his soon to be published book *Leadership for Mortals*.

> Throughout history, leaders who have made substantive and lasting contributions to society were passionately, steadfastly, and often obstinately committed to ideals and causes that were meaningful in their time. These leaders focused on what really mattered to them and their followers, often at great personal and professional cost. Sustainable leadership is about a passionate, obstinate commitment to the enhancement of deep learning for all students – learning for life, learning for understanding, learning for an increasingly fluid, messy and risky world (Fink, 2004, Conference Notes).

While each of the teachers interviewed were deeply committed to their students, colleagues and families, it was evident that they recognized the potential cost of not paying attention to all the elements in their life.

The teachers at Central Elementary School were involved in numerous activities. Participation in intramural and extramural committees, Alberta Teachers Association committees and a number of other school and district curriculum committees represented the wide range of professional commitments teachers took up. Within these commitments, each of the teachers identified a point of balance or reference they used to establish a sense of control or balance in their lives.

Shirley viewed herself as a procrastinator but got things done when they were required. She established priority in her roles as mother and teacher. Her top priorities included time for her youngest child and meeting the demands of her students and classroom. Once these two priorities were addressed other responsibilities were addressed as time permitted. Her involvement in the writing committee was reduced the year her class was challenging. The following year with a stronger group of students, she had more time to engage in other activities at school.

Bev always viewed herself as a mother first and a grade one teacher second. She was very involved with on-line learning projects and provided technological support within her school. In regard to balancing her workload and life she made an interesting comment about the constant demand on time and task orientation she possesses. "You know what teachers are like. We just keep going until the job is done." (Bev) Her comments reflect the highly engaged nature of teaching that is characterized by Huberman's classroom press where a plethora of decisions are made daily and a multitude of tasks from the trivial to sublime are completed on a routine basis.

There is a sense of constant monitoring and prioritization of tasks occurring in order to balance the demands on her time between mother, teacher and involvement in the school improvement project.

Jill has "marking which is my personal time" and a myriad of committees she is involved in at the school and in the community. As she tells her friends, "If you want to visit, you better come here and spend the

night. That's all the time I have." Jill tempered her involvement based on the length of time she has taught a grade level and degree to which she understood the curriculum. She referred to the larger projects her colleagues have undertaken in their classes to explain this.

> You don't do that your first year in a grade because you don't know what you are doing. So in grade five I am still figuring out what I am teaching. Are kids are going to find this hard? How can I teach this best and that kind of thing? (Jill)

At this point in his career, Bill viewed himself as mentor. He had withdrawn from most committees and made himself available for those who wished to call and solicit the historical perspective on how things were done and where things should be going.

At the time of the interview, Leland was a new father and, as noted earlier, had spent more time listening with the writing committee to determine the direction the staff wished to go and understanding of the project. For Leland, balancing priorities involved cautious exploration before active engagement.

With the exception of Leland, the newcomer, and Bill, the potential retiree, each of the individuals had identified and established a balancing point between their personal and professional lives. They have established their individual priorities and demonstrated selectivity when allotting their time inside and outside of the school while faced with multiple initiatives and constraints on time.

The ongoing tension between moral purpose and personal commitment outside of the school has created different balance points for each of the participants in the study. Each has altered the balancing point in relation to their stage in their

career, personal circumstances and depth of commitment or moral purpose they manifest in their school. While all remain committed to their students and colleagues, they are constantly being challenged to measure it with the commitment they have in their personal lives away from the school.

Given the ongoing changes that teachers face in their personal and professional lives, the need to strive for balance and dealing with change may be one of the most difficult challenges teachers face.

> Teachers need to increase their capacity for dealing with change because if they don't they are going to continue to be victimized by the relentless intrusion of external change forces (Fullan, 2001, p. 123).

The capacity that Fullan refers to, is in part determined by teachers' ability to find balance between their personal and professional lives while remaining true to their moral purpose. The challenge for the teachers involved in this study does not appear to be significantly different from teachers in other parts of Canada and the international community. Naylor addresses teacher workload and stress in his research. He observes:

> If the literature describes the increased alienation between the "left" and "right" hands of the state, with a negative impact on teachers' and other public sector employees' workload, it also describes an altruistic, highly-motivated commitment by teachers to offer much more than the minimum required. The literature therefore states that teaching has become an overworked profession, while teachers are individually motivated to more than the minimum required. Somewhere between these concepts lies a balance, with hard-working, motivated teachers finding satisfaction from the vocation of teaching within a manageable workload (Naylor, 2001, p. 12).

While Naylor observes that "overworked" employees have become endemic in society today, he suggests that when the balance has been lost in the teaching

profession, "overworked and stressed teachers can become harmful to students and negatively impact student learning" (Naylor, 2001, p. 13). Throughout the interviews, it was evident that teachers attempted to keep their balance, while engaging in multiple initiatives to improve student learning. Where change is perceived as loss (Marris, 1986) the dominant question for each teacher has been, "Is the gain worth the pain?" Where one element of a teacher's personal or professional life has gained, inevitably the other has had to reflect a degree of loss.

Changes In Practice

Fullan (2001) identifies three components of change when implementing a new program.

> (1) the possible use of new or revised materials (instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies)
> (2) the possible use of new teaching approaches (i.e. new teaching strategies or activities) and
> (3) the possible alteration of beliefs (e.g. pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new policies or programs) (Fullan, 2001, p. 39)

Discussions around change in practice were grounded in two areas. First teachers examined their own practice to determine if they had changed and, second, they verified it in terms of the impact it had on the students. The connection between teacher practice and student learning was present throughout discussions on change as well as selection of school improvement initiatives. All expressed a need for proven practice and best practices to support initiatives. As Bev stated, "I am going to do what I think makes a difference to my kids" and that difference must be demonstrated in advance. Bill adds, "We need to be able to have some

sense of how that is going to effect us as learners and then we can see some value to share that with kids."

Each of the teachers identified areas of change in their practice. As they reflected on their practice, changes ranged from single strategies to philosophical shifts in language arts instruction.

Shirley identified two significant changes for her. Her introduction to a local author provided her with an organizer to develop story writing and she continues to use it.

> He inspired me with the characters and even developing the plot and helping the kids underway. (Shirley)

The transition from special education to classroom teacher was also a significant shift in Shirley's thinking where identifying ideas and sentences were no longer the goals and developing ideas and paragraphs were the expected outcomes.

In speaking to her change in practice, she described her grade one student who could not read at the start of the year and the difference it had made.

> You know things that schools were doing and I am sure that is part of why we have accelerated reader and the A to Z reading program. One little girl in my class couldn't read at the beginning of the year was just frustrated at the pre-summer level. Just working with her and having her do reading and the sight word thing - she can pick up those grade one accelerated readers, go do the test, and get 100%. I don't know that if we didn't have AISI if I would have that kind of success with her. (Shirley)

The AISI experience is defined in real terms of student learning and outcomes for Shirley. Seeing the difference it had made reinforced her commitment to the goals of the project. The experience had also caused Shirley to refocus and reflect on

her role as teacher and learner. She described herself returning as a newcomer to the profession and becoming energized.

> I think it's refocused a bit more back to the curriculum and wanting to be able to teach the best that you can teach. It brought that focus back for me to even try new things. I think for a while there, I was a little bit stagnant in what I was doing and trying the same things. AISI gave me some new life and new ideas to use and I think that has to be part of your teaching anyway. You need to keep learning new things. Sometimes it is hard to take everything that is out there, pull it in and say now this is what I currently do, what can I change, because you can't do it all, you know? There are a lot of good ideas out there and which ones of these will work best with these students? That part you know, that's the tough part I find. Great we have all these wonderful things now. What is it that I can do with my kids to learn the most that they can? I don't know the answer to that one. (Shirley)

Shirley identified her need to be a learner however her final comments suggest that her ability to seek out new opportunities, investigate them and determine their merit has been enhanced and challenged by AISI. While it had opened her eyes to new strategies and approaches, she appeared to question her own ability to determine the appropriateness of an initiative for her students and which initiative would assist her students learn to their potential. This concern is consistent with Shirley's earlier comments that reflected a changing student population each year with a new set of needs. Between the challenges of new ways of teaching and changing student needs each year, she noted that she did not have the answer on how to deal with this dynamic demand on her as a teacher.

Bev has identified changes in her practices that have resulted in a significant departure from her past practice. She expressed part of the dilemma that Shirley identified in terms of taking on new practices and

experiencing the reluctance and challenge to let go of the old. The risk of giving up the old and experiencing the loss identified by Marris (1986) is evident in her comments.

> It has brought new things in that I wasn't doing before. It's brought in best practices - making word walls. It is a new way of teaching and not that I wasn't teaching effectively before, but it has made me a better teacher for sure. Then all of those things make you reflect on the choices you make as a teacher because you have to make choices if you are going to take on this new thing. What are you giving up in its place? So for one thing I went from my first five years of teaching grade one with phonics books and took that brave step off the plank this year and said I'm not ordering phonics books. I don't have time. I can't do phonics books and do all these other things. But I think we are doing perfectly well without phonics books, thank you very much. So there were some of those kinds of things that were growth things, because you have to as a teacher reflect on does this matter and is this important enough for me to make time for it? (Bev)

Bev also highlights the tension between adopting new practices and determining which old practices to let go. The context for this dilemma had two dimensions. The first was the impact on her students and teaching, and the second, the time required to think about the change and make it happen. While she supports the need for self-reflection on one's practice and making changes, she also references prior experiences where she met top – down expectations for change with resistance and refused to change. In the first instance, insufficient support and time were provided and in the following adequate rationale did not exist for the merit and validity of the initiative.

> We have done in-services, so they know what they are talking about. We did that before we asked them to do it. We have also gone into it with baby steps. We in-service you on one part and you don't have to be doing everything right now. You just work on that and see how that goes. Then we will in-service you on the next thing. It hasn't been like a lot of things like the diagnostic stuff that came down from

> the government in reading and math. Here you go, here is your kit, go ahead and use it where you are supposed to do this whole thing without anybody ever saying but here is what you don't have to do. (Bev)

The implementation of math and language arts diagnostics highlighted the pivotal question for teachers when they address change (Evans, 1996). Is the gain worth the pain? The pain for Bev meant giving up time from other areas of her personal or professional life, or both in order to continue to respond the litany of change initiatives without ample opportunity to experience or understand the gain. Where the gains did not make the pains worthwhile she had chosen a different course of action.

> If you can't say this is making a difference to my kids, but my principal and my superintendent are saying that I have to do this, of course I am not going to go out and say "No I'm not doing it." That is not the hill I am going to die on. I am going to talk like I am doing it and when I close my classroom door, chances are I am going to do what I think makes a difference to my kids. (Bev)

Her resistance to change also caused her to become insular in her practice and focus only on her classroom as a means to protect herself from her supervisors and initiatives that she perceived would not make a difference for her students.

Her experiences with the stream of initiatives have been to promote gradual implementation of the literacy project and she has connected student learning and best practices to emphasize the relevance and importance of the project. Given the gradual implementation, she felt it would take several years to realize fully the associated gains of the project as assessed and measured by the provincial

achievement tests. However she did believe that there was evidence in her classroom of positive change and the pain has been worth the gain.

> I don't know if you can say immediately, yes there's payback. I mean you can tell as teachers. You can look at it and say my kids can write better stories. My kids can, but will you have the hardcore data? No. (Bev)

Bev's reflection on change is consistent with the research. Earl and Lee (1998) in their review of the Manitoba School Improvement Project and Fullan (2001) argue that change takes time. Fullan suggests "even moderately complex changes take from 3 to 5 years, while larger scale efforts can take 5 to 10 years with sustaining improvements still being problematic" (Fullan, 2001, p. 52). He goes on to add "change is a process, not an event" (Fullan, 2001, p. 53). For Bev, the change process involved elements of her practice and her community while keeping in mind that over time her students would benefit.

Jill's reflection on her change was contextualized in having to teach a new grade level and her personal investment in implementing the balanced literacy project. As she attempted to make changes she experienced the challenge of a new grade and new teaching strategy simultaneously.

> Anyhow, you know their levels, so by November I was ready to try it and it was just like "holy smokes" it was just so hard, cause you give these guys a book and you say, "Okay, well I would like you to write, pretend you are this character and write this." Well they couldn't do it. They just don't have enough background skills to automatically do this on their own. The teacher is up at the front and we are all going to do this together, and I picked out key things that I knew we had to do ahead of time. I have to teach this, but ironically they just didn't get it the first time. Then they were supposed to put words into a crossword puzzle. Well there was no way. So I'm working with them, and I'm thinking oh man I am spending my teaching time, teaching them how to make a crossword puzzle, is this really what I need to be doing? Is

this the most important skill that I can pick out? But I got smarter. (Jill)

Jill reflected, refocused, prioritized the concepts to be learned and adjusted her practice. This resulted in student success. Jill's personal investment and commitment to the balanced literacy project has had a significant influence on her approach and expectations she has of herself and colleagues.

> I guess the big way I look at it, is everybody makes their decisions for themselves. So if you don't want to be part of balanced literacy, then don't. It seriously isn't going to bother me. If you do making words once every two weeks, I'm not going to worry about it. I would like to be in my happy little world, I mean I would like that to happen way more often. (Jill)

While Jill's comments represented an air of resignation, by the end of the third year of AISI, the second year of balanced literacy, almost all staff had begun to participate in the literacy project.

Bill perceived himself as a learner and while he did not identify specific changes to his practice, he identified the significance of the brain research and the impact it had on his thinking about language arts, teaching and learning in his classroom. For him, the brain research created connections between different bodies of knowledge and validated his thinking and pedagogy.

Leland's role as the resource room teacher placed him in a different situation. While he still taught writing, he was not as engaged in the balanced literacy and focused more on the Fast For Word program and writing initiatives. He actively engaged in dialogue with teachers in the project and committee.

> I feel I made a difference – in terms of writing, all my students that would regularly come to me for the pullout went back to their regular

> classes for the writing instructions from the authors. I tried to pop in on the class when they were doing the writing instruction. In terms of writing, I would like to think I made a difference. I feel I was getting my kids to do a lot more writing. I was looking at these different web sites. I was trying out different rubrics for evaluation. I think the biggest difference I made was with the Fast For Word. I was providing some therapy that wasn't in the community. (Leland)

Given that he teaches math and language arts to grades three, four, five and six, Leland has had to make changes to his program every year with a number of students returning over the years.

> I have to change every year, because I sometimes have the same student for 3 years. I can't do the same writing project. I have to change. I'm forced to, but you know what it's really helpful if you keep changing. I've had renewed energy every year because I've thought of a new writing assignment for those kids to do. The kids understand that. There's the odd time where I'll be working with the grade threes and grade fives and the fives say "I remember doing that" and they will start talking about what they wrote about and that would help out with the grade where kids are starting to throw ideas around to each other and helping each other out. (Leland)

Leland also referenced his graduate studies and noted that he was journaling and writing about things that he had tried in his classroom and the effects they had on his students. He mentioned the use of action research as part of this process and added, "I think it would be nice to see all teachers doing that that cycle."

A characteristic present for all the teachers interviewed was the tension between existing practice and best practices identified in the project. Best practices were required to meet a particular threshold of effectiveness before they were accepted. The need for time to learn the new practice, while continuing current practice influenced the ability of teachers to master the new concept. Demands on

personal and professional time were made engaging teachers in the ongoing struggle for balance.

The final tension occurred between sustaining the new practice and determination if and when the old practice would be given up. The challenge was heightened for some as they changed grade levels or had additional assignments. In the end, the degree to which they managed these tensions, appear to have determined the degree to which teachers have changed their practice.

All teachers identified evidence of change and learning in teacher practice as significant outcomes from AISI. Fullan (2001) emphasizes three dimensions along which change in practice occurs. Changes "in materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs, in what people do and think – are essential if the intended outcome is to be achieved" (Fullan, 2001, p. 46). To that end, there had been a change in resources, approaches to teaching had been modified in several classrooms, and the beliefs about how the school should function as a community had begun to emerge as a focus in the third year.

Changes for Future AISI Projects

A consistent theme of need for time was central for all of the teachers as they reflected on their past AISI project and their current project that was well underway. As an absolute necessity, all requested that time be added in the next round of the project.

To that end two days of release time have been provided for staff to review materials that have been ordered and are available at the school. Additional release

time has been built in to attend balanced literacy cohort meetings and visit classrooms. Jill outlines her proposal she presented to the principal.

> Time is a huge piece. In our proposal we gave each teacher five days of sub time. We will use two of those for in-services this year. One potentially could be a classroom visit that leaves them two days. Now I'm not quite sure how the principal does AISI, because he hasn't told me that we didn't get five days and at the beginning of the year I said "you all get five days" and he didn't contradict me so I am assuming that's right. But he is also a little concerned about the cash we are spending, so I don't know if everybody gets five days, but that was in the plan. So we have had teachers that have said, "I want to take an afternoon and just go look at momentum stuff" and then in division one, two of them would get together and they would set up their day. We are going to do guided reading here and they have actually set it up with the blocks and that is how they spent their half-day. But for teachers that aren't actually taking time off, like if you take time off, you have got to then plan for your sub. But for teachers that aren't actually taking time off, it is really difficult to sit down and say I am going to devote this amount of time to figuring this out. Time is a huge one. (Jill)

With the additional time added, the school continues to focus on balanced literacy and is attempting to provide time for teachers to observe each other, work together and promote a learning community. Ultimately the hope is to provide time to learn and work together because the collective sense of the group is that without appropriate release time, the literacy project will not be completed.

Minor Themes

One of the themes raised during the focus group discussion reflected the moral dilemma teachers felt they were placed in. Significant dollars were being spent within the first year of the AISI project to send teachers away to a number of professional development opportunities provincially and internationally. A degree of discomfort was expressed at attending a conference of significant importance and at a

cost that teachers had not seen before within the division and could not otherwise afford to attend. Those who attended felt the new experience was valuable but they questioned why dollars could be made available for AISI and none to reduce class sizes within their school. There was a sense that perhaps the dollars should be flowing directly into the classroom to address the immediate student needs as opposed to a longer and more speculative goal that had not been articulated and shared nor understood by all.

When questioned in the individual interviews, teachers felt their dilemma had eased or passed with the understanding that their attendance was making a difference in the classroom and dollars were not coming from the instructional budget. They continue to be concerned with Alberta Learning and how funding is provided to schools.

Role of the AISI Coordinator

Bev and Jill, the leaders of the balanced literacy project, were the only two participants who identified the role of the AISI Coordinator as crucial to the project's success and their involvement. The AISI Coordinator peaked their interest in balanced literacy and then directed them to begin purchasing resources for the school. The additional responsibilities of writing up the project proposal and final reports are demands on time that Jill indicates would just not be possible for her or Bev.

> If we didn't have the AISI Coordinator, I wouldn't be doing AISI because there is no way I could do that and teach full time. No way. She does a lot of the administrative kind of stuff and all the stuff that is required that has to be done, but I mean realistically, you just wouldn't get teachers. (Jill)

The AISI Coordinator provided the support morally and administratively to Jill and Bev beyond what they received at the school level. In the absence of this support, both teachers believed the project would have had a very different set of outcomes and potentially not realized any change at all.

Conclusion

Within the various themes that were identified by teachers, there was an apparent tension between AISI as planned by Alberta Learning and AISI as lived by the teachers at Central Elementary School. Even within their plan, a tension existed between the plan as proposed and plan as lived. The tension is manifested in the themes of goal focus, leadership, balancing time and commitments, professional development experiences and changes in practice. While the group of teachers have established a set of common concerns and issues, the way each teacher has experienced and perceived them has been unique to that individual and characterized by their identities as teachers, priorities they have set in their personal and professional lives and the ability to maintain balance between them.

The personal cycle of urgency – energy – agency with renewed energy continued to play itself out for each of the members as they explored and found their individual pathways in the AISI project. While each individual struggled to make meaning of positive and negative influences both internally and externally, their moral purpose and commitment to their students carried them through their individual pathways and cycles. Earl and Lee (1998) examine this cycle in the context of the Manitoba School Improvement Program.

> To foster school improvement, unleash the energy within. The urgency, energy, agency, more energy cycle of improvement in MSIP

> schools is a powerful model for thinking about how school improvement works in very personal terms. Teachers, students and parents are not cogs in a wheel. In each school, they are particular human beings with their own perspectives and beliefs and visions. The trick is finding ways to touch their hearts and their imaginations so that changing the school becomes their passion, because it matters to them, and then providing the pressure and the support to help sustain their momentum (Earl and Lee, 1998, p. 72).

The teachers struggled to come to terms with the purposes of AISI, their own goal and their own sense of purpose within the school and to make sense from both their personal journey as well as the shared journey with their colleagues. They demonstrated renewed energy several times as they refocused their vision at the beginning of year two, and by the end of the third year after having made positive change and improvement, they began to perceive themselves as agents of change. This resulted in renewed energy that carried them into the second round of AISI projects.

In the third year of the AISI project it appeared that their struggle to become more open, collaborative and participatory reflected a desire to develop a learning community that was different from their historical model in the school. Within this context they recognized the need for development of skills and practices in order to develop their school as a learning community. As Lee and Earl (1998) have observed in the Manitoba School Improvement project, once teachers become more knowledgeable and clearer on their direction they come to see themselves as active change agents with the required skills and moral purpose to address and tackle the problems within their schools.

Chapter 6: Findings, Limitations, and Implications

Introduction

This interpretive inquiry has used a case study approach to examine the experiences of teachers engaged in an externally mandated school improvement program. Group and individual interviews, review of artifacts and a personal journal have been used as means to collecting data. The subsequent inductive analysis has developed a number of themes that have been shaped by the conceptual framework established in Chapter Two. Understandings of school improvement, the complex educational environment, individual nature of change and various theories of change have provided a framework to shape and guide the discussions, analysis and findings.

This chapter shall present the findings for each of the three research questions and present the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers view their own practice and situate their own professional identities when they are involved in school improvement initiatives?

Teachers live and work in a dynamic environment that is constantly being negotiated. A tension exists between their personal lives, beliefs and expectations and the expectations and demands placed on them by their students, colleagues, school administration, school division, school community and province. As individuals outside the school they are members of the broader socio-political environment as taxpayers, parents, sons and daughters and community members. While many other professions can claim to have similar dynamics and tensions, no other occupation or profession is expected to "mitigate and counteract many of the

problems societies face today. Only teaching is expected to create the human skills and capacities that will enable individuals and organizations to survive and succeed in today's knowledge society" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 9). In essence, teachers are asked to solve the problems that societies face while being a part of both the problem as members of society and solution as teachers. The teachers in this study live their personal and professional lives within this broad interactive framework.

The experiences that Jill, Bill, Bev, Shirley and Leland have described represent their phenomenology of change, how they experienced change even though this may not have been the way change was intended. Their understandings provide insight into how teachers situate themselves and view their own practice and professional identities when they have engaged in a school improvement project under the aegis of AISI.

Shirley, Bev, Jill, Leland and Bill described their own identities and pathways as teachers, family members and members of the community. The introduction of AISI as a provincial initiative was received with a significant degree of reluctance that was fueled by a lack of understanding of AISI. Leland suggests that this lack of understanding has continued into the second round of AISI projects. Bev and Jill appear to confirm this with their comment on the lack of feedback regarding finances for their proposed plans for the second round of AISI.

Attempts at making sense of AISI were driven by each teacher's moral purpose within the context of the urgency-energy-agency-renewed energy cycle where they ultimately began to realize their individual capacities as positive change agents within their classrooms and school. The degree to which each of the

participants engaged in the AISI project was influenced by a number of variables that ranged from personal situations in their families, student needs and numbers in their classrooms, number of years teaching a grade level, other initiatives within the school, and personal attitudes that have resulted from socio-political influences at the local and provincial levels. Each participant described the ongoing negotiation that occurred between their personal and professional life as they attempted to develop a balance between their moral purpose and their personal identities as mothers, fathers, daughters and community members. Finally, it was not until each of the participants began to see themselves as positive change agents that they engaged in the AISI project with renewed energy resulting in more change. Attitudes toward AISI shifted from ambivalence and scepticism to excitement and hope.

Professional development acted as a significant catalyst for teachers to change their perceptions and attitudes. While all valued and affirmed the merits of international professional development opportunities, the attendance of the AISI Conference was consistently the most influential in changing perceptions and attitudes. Without exception the AISI conference served as a catalyst for teachers to realize the potential impact one teacher could have on students in a class or school. Jill's comments "We can do that" reflect the empowerment that occurred at the conference. In addition, teachers were exposed to a range of improvement initiatives that other school divisions had undertaken. The participants recognized the AISI conference as the most influential activity that helped shape their personal visions as positive change agents. This realization is particularly significant given that teachers engage in the urgency-energy-agency cycle and do not reengage with renewed energy

unless they have realized some agency or in this instance realized the capacity each had as positive change agents. (Earl and Lee, 1998).

Shirley described an ongoing tension between her role as mother with a young child countered by the needs of her students, number of students in her classroom, and sense of responsibility she had to participate actively as a colleague in the school improvement efforts. Bev, one of the most actively involved participants, assumed an expanded leadership role in AISI, was actively involved in a Telus Learning Project, but was emphatic about being a mother first and foremost. Jill also took on an increased role in leadership in the AISI project, experienced the loss of a parent, and also experienced a loss of connection of friends outside of the school. She informed her friends that if they wanted to see more of her they would have to spend the night. Leland, while in a unique position given that he was a Special Education teacher, maintained a lower profile given the limited number of years he had taught at Central Elementary School. He was more cautious about taking on greater roles in the project, wanted to be supportive, and in the second round of AISI projects became the Vice Principal of the school. Bill, the most senior and in his final year of teaching, expressed the least challenge in finding balance. However, he was the most sceptical and opinionated participant regarding the initiatives and directions of the provincial government. He was the most reluctant to accept AISI as it was presented to him based on his past experiences.

Consistently among all the participants was the sense that being a learner was an essential part of their professional identities. They all confirmed the need to change given the particular circumstances of classroom numbers, student needs,

changing curriculum and personal circumstances. However, the greatest changes in practice and beliefs resulted from their experiences as learners while attending international conferences and most significantly the AISI conference where they learned about other teachers' practices, their successes, and rekindled or developed their identities as learners.

The individual narratives of the participants reflect the understanding and sense making that occurred at two different levels. Each participant within the context of his or her moral purpose addressed the cognitive and emotional elements of human behavior (Evans, 1996). The cognitive element addressed the individual understanding of the importance of continuing to be a learner, student need, action to be taken and ultimately understanding of AISI and its purpose. The emotional level attached the moral purpose of each teacher and to the degree change mattered to the individual and the students. It was also influenced by past positive and negative experiences and predispositions toward prior initiatives and interactions. The technology initiative by Alberta Learning was one of the examples that influenced receptivity to AISI.

As a group, they struggled to define their goal focus, formalize leadership and develop an understanding of AISI as written. As Leland, Bev and Jill have implied understanding of AISI continues to be a challenge. The goal for the AISI project resided within the thoughts of the vice principal that departed in the first year and based on artifacts and the interviews the goal for the school continues to be articulated verbally with no knowledge of a goal that has been written with goals and indicators.

Schon (1971) suggests that both the individual and social system move through stages of developing understanding and predictability in order to maintain a sense of stability. While the participants have negotiated their individual pathways and understandings, change or innovation "cannot be assimilated unless its meaning is shared" (Marris, 1975, p. 121).

The need to develop a shared meaning was highlighted by Leland, Bev, Jill and Bill referring to the importance of having all teachers "on the same page". As the project progressed Bev, Shirley and Leland perceived AISI as an opportunity to build capacity while Jill and Bill continued to hold on for some time to the view that AISI was a deficit model of change where the provincial government was directing and telling schools and teachers what they did not know and needed to do to improve. In the latter half of the project under the direction of Jill and Bev, the project came to be understood more as building capacity where teachers were given choices to participate in activities and select resources. This shift in approach reflected the change in mental models and a beginning for redefining the learning community as conceived by Jill and Bev. The recognition and acceptance of individual pathways and circumstances that teachers were in, and acceptance of the right for teachers to participate reflected a developing maturity of the staff, its understanding of itself and need to define its identity to create stability and predictability that Schon (1971) recognizes as a natural development for a social system. This acceptance allowed Shirley to engage in the AISI project at various degrees of engagement dependent upon her classroom demands and situations in her personal life. It allowed Bill to be opinionated and provide a historical perspective on past practice. Leland was able

participate in a broader role in spite of his focus on special education. He also perceived this shift as an opportunity to build teacher capacity and ownership over their practice.

The learning community that Bev and Jill modeled for the staff, also reflected need for a change in the actions of the principal and school division. While none of the participants were critical of the leadership at the school, a cautious expression for greater involvement of the principal and better communications systemically were identified. As leaders, Jill and Bev were more engaged in the AISI project than other teachers within the school, yet they were unsure of the particulars of their budget, reporting of data, and were unsure if their proposed activities for the second AISI project had been approved at the time of the interviews.

Bev and Jill identified a significant beacon of hope for their future AISI project. The addition of release time was viewed as critical in order for teachers to work together and visit other teacher's classrooms. Sufficient trust had been developed to open doors to fellow colleagues within the school and begin to develop the sense of community where collective "I's" have begun to become a collective "we" that Sergiovani (1994) describes as essential to a learning community.

Bev, Jill, Leland, Bill and Shirley work and live in an extremely complex environment with a multitude of variables to contend with on a daily basis. The teachers in this study dealt with these influences in a holistic fashion. The pathways that each of the teachers have chosen reflect the negotiation of the tensions between personal and professional lives. While some of the influences appear to have had a general impact on the group, each of the influences has affected each of the teachers

to a lesser or greater degree depending upon the individual circumstances. Only by exploring the individual narratives is one able to determine the effect these themes or influences have had.

The experiences that Jill, Bill, Bev, Shirley and Leland have described represent their understandings as co-constructed by the researcher. Their understandings provide insight into the black box of their school improvement project under the aegis of AISI and provide insight into how teachers find their individual pathways, personal and professional identities within the complex environment that they are situated.

2. What expectations did teachers have as they engaged in the school improvement process and were they realized in the course of their project?

The introduction of AISI to the staff at Central Elementary was met initially with scepticism. The difficulties associated with the loss of the vice principal and break in continuity of the project created an environment where the research participants were unable to identify a goal or expectation other than they were continuing to focus on writing as they had in prior years. It was not until the second year of the project where exposure to international professional development opportunities, the AISI Conference and refocused goal on balanced literacy created a heightened understanding of the potential AISI had to offer as well as the potential each teacher had to offer as a positive change agent in the school.

The second year of Central Elementary's AISI project reflected a shift from reading to encompass a balanced literacy approach with an emphasis on reading and writing. When asked about specific outcomes or expectations regarding these areas,

teachers indicated that no specific targets had been set. While each of the participants identified improvements in student writing and reading, an expectation for growth consistent for all students had not been identified.

The principal introduced international professional development opportunities in the fall of 2001 with the understanding that all would have an opportunity to attend and attendance would occur in groupings of two or more staff per conference. Teachers attended and identified a number of outcomes from these experiences. Leland and Shirley identified new skills and social experiences that might not have occurred otherwise. Shirley added that hearing the author speak was the only way she would be able to learn as she did not have the energy to read at home. Bill identified new learning in the area of brain based learning. Bev experienced an affirmation of her practices as a language arts teacher.

The AISI Conference created a set of expectations and possibilities that had not been identified earlier by the participants. The experience created a sense of hope and belief that teachers could become change agents in their schools. Jill highlights this epiphany by describing the impact of one teacher on a group of students as well as the power of a division wide initiative on student learning.

While there may have been expectations at the outset of the AISI project, they did not compare to the expectations that teachers created for themselves in the second and third year of their project. As they saw others engaged in a variety of initiatives, they began to develop the confidence and belief that they too could attempt these initiatives. Leland describes this process as "empowering" where teachers took ownership of the direction for their learning and the goals of the school.

3. What did teachers learn?

Learning occurred at several levels in the AISI project. Teachers learned specific skills for their students and classroom, a deeper understanding of their roles as agents of change within their school, about their roles as members of a learning community, and about AISI and making change within their school. These areas are generally consistent with the criteria Fullan (2001) identifies as essential when implementing new programs: new instructional resources, new teaching strategies and possible alteration of beliefs.

The participants developed several new skills that were implemented in their classes. Leland and Shirley were both trained in the Fast For Word program. Leland has continued to make use of the program as a Special Education teacher Shirley indicates she has not used it given her teaching assignment.

Within the writing and balanced literacy goals, Jill, Bev, and Bill have all indicated they continue to make use of word walls and a number of writing strategies within their classes. Bev added that while the reading conference did not teach her new skills, it did confirm her practices as effective and in keeping with current research.

Bev and Jill were key players in involving staff in the second and third year of the project to purchase new resources. Teachers were given choices on the resources they used in their classroom.

All the participants expressed concerns around making change in their practice. Would the new practice make a difference? When should the change be made? What do I give up in my current practice?

A deeper sense of change and learning appeared in their language used to describe themselves and their school. Teachers expressed confidence in themselves and their colleagues. Within the group and individual interviews the participants characterized the staff at their schools as "master teachers" and perceived their school as performing quite well based on the provincial achievement tests. The self-perceptions developed in the latter part of the project reflected a growth in confidence and belief that each teacher could make a difference at his or her school. Teachers had developed a belief that they could be successful agents of change within their school and classroom. Observing others from across the province and initiating changes within classrooms and the school contributed to this.

Teachers also appeared to be learning how to balance their personal and professional lives more effectively. This process appears to center around each individual's moral purpose they brought to the school and the commitment they have to their personal lives away from school. From Shirley who has decreased or increased her involvement depending on student learning demands in her classroom to family commitments to Bev and Jill who have opted to increase release time at school for teachers, strategies have emerged to address the competition for time.

The participants also deepened their understanding of AISI and ways to make change in the future. As Bev, Leland and Jill expanded, they have learned how to use AISI funds to provide release time for teachers to collaborate and identified release time as a priority for round two of their AISI project. Five days of release time for each teacher have been identified as a priority. Within this proposal is recognition that release time requires substitute preparation and may not be utilized

by all. Observations of other teachers and opportunities to work together and promote a learning community have been identified as their priorities.

Bev and Jill challenged the learning community model at Central Elementary School. They were not prepared to accept the status quo and modeled an alternative that was based on acceptance, trust and choice. Central to this approach was an acceptance of individuals without negative repercussions or judgment and a desire to have an environment where teachers can talk openly about their instructional practice, materials and learning. Jill sums it up, "Wouldn't it be perfect if we had that kind of dialogue?"

Conclusion

Jill, Shirley, Leland, Bill and Bev experienced their phenomenology of change that reflected the individuality of their personal and professional narratives within the larger experience of an AISI school improvement project. Each negotiated the balance between the personal expectations associated with moral purpose and the demands of the AISI project and ongoing professional, community and socio-political influences. While Huberman (1983) describes the classroom press where approximately one thousand decisions are made per day by teachers, there appears to be a broader learning community press where teachers engage as members and situate themselves in a dynamic balancing act where the tension between competing demands is negotiated on an individual and daily basis.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to state unequivocally that it is difficult to make direct comparisons between the experiences of the participants at Central Elementary

School and other schools and their AISI projects. Only five teachers of approximately 25 were interviewed and their opinions represent only those that chose to participate in the research. The reasons for not participating in the research study are unknown to the researcher. The setting of an elementary school with approximately 350 students in kindergarten to grade six also limits comparisons to schools with different grade configurations or student population.

It is also critical to note that this three year project occurred during the first cycle of the AISI initiative in Alberta. The experiences of teachers in the study are situated within this time period in the AISI project initiated Alberta Learning. The evolving nature of the AISI project presents a unique set of conditions that are not likely to be found elsewhere.

Implications

There are ramifications in this case study of teachers at Central Elementary School for practitioners and researchers. Practitioners might consider the following suggestions in light of the findings of this study:

1. Teachers are in a unique situation as members of the school community and broader socio political community (Hargreaves, 2003). The experiences each teacher brings are unique, and influence the way in which teachers situate themselves within the school improvement process. Teachers must recognize this in themselves and their colleagues and also recognize that in a learning community there is strength in their diversity. They are not expected to be clones of one another. Administrators and leaders must also believe that diversity within a school is a strength and recognize that each individual will

become more or less involved dependent upon their individual personal and professional identities.

2. Urgency-Energy-Agency-More Energy Cycle: Teachers must have the opportunity to develop a personal and professional narrative where they see themselves as positive agents of change and have opportunities to be actively engaged in the change process to support their moral purpose. It is not until teachers see themselves as positive change agents that sustainable commitment is realized. For this to occur, teachers must believe that the proposed change is proven or research driven and second, that they are capable to change or learn the requisite skills in order to implement the change.
3. Phenomenology of Change: Teachers are both individuals and members of a community. Teachers experience change as individuals and develop meaning through shared experience. Opportunities must exist for both personal and professional identities to co-exist and complement each other within the context of the school community and broader community. In order for this to occur teachers must have the opportunity to have "real conversations" about their personal and professional narratives. These conversations can only occur in an environment where there is sufficient trust to speak openly and critically about their practice as it occurs in their classrooms.
4. Learning Community: The evolution of a learning community is built upon shared understandings, acceptance of all members of the community and trust where a collective "we" begins to emerge. As the learning community

evolves there is recognition of the capacity of individuals to participate more or less depending upon their circumstances. The school improvement process must provide opportunities for individuals to experience the community with both its pressures and supports. As Little (1981) suggests improving schools demonstrate ongoing dialogue about learning and teaching, peer observation, planning and working collaboratively and learning from others. All of these activities require openness, trust and acceptance, which are the essentials of a learning community.

5. Understanding AISI as Written: Teachers involved in AISI projects must have an understanding of the goals and expectations of AISI as articulated by Alberta Learning. As they begin to situate themselves within the context of school improvement, teachers are constantly reflecting on past experience, present setting and situating their future within the context of the school improvement project. Without an understanding of AISI and its expectations, teachers are likely to become sceptical about AISI's mandate and long term goals.
6. Goal Focus: The formal and informal leaders must develop a shared understanding with all staff of the purpose, goals and outcomes of their AISI project. Without goal focus, a collection of individuals who work together will persist as opposed to a community committed to a common goal.
7. Professional Development: Professional development provides opportunities for teachers to develop new skills, enhance collegiality and become empowered as change agents when they see it in others. The annual AISI

conference acted as a catalyst and provided teachers with an opportunity to see members of their broader provincial learning community as exemplars in this regard.

8. Leadership: The principal must play a role in legitimizing the school improvement activities beyond authorizing expenditures. The principal must understand, support and challenge the initiative. Ultimately, Senge (2000) and Fritz (2000) suggest, the leader's role is to create the structural or creative tension between what is and what is aspired to and reinforce the importance of the goal.
9. Balance: Education leaders and teachers must pay attention to the tension between personal and professional lives when school improvement is initiated. Multiple initiatives in conjunction with changing demands professionally and personally can result in negative effects ranging from withdrawal of participation to stress related absence.
10. Complexity: Fullan (1999) describes a variety of change forces and suggests that while they may be addressed individually they exist systemically. Similarly for teachers and their phenomenology of change, while individual influences may be identified, they exist collectively and interactively in a dynamic changing complex environment. It is not possible to examine one element without considering it in the full context.

Researchers may wish to consider the following suggestions:

1. An ethnographic study of a similar school could examine the experiences of an entire staff engaged in an AISI project to examine the experiences of individuals and group simultaneously.
2. A similar case study should be conducted in other settings beyond the current grade level, student population or project focus.
3. Longitudinal studies could examine the experiences and perceptions of teachers after having participated in two AISI project cycles.

The Researcher As Changed

One of the outcomes of interpretive inquiry is the change experienced by the researcher (Ellis, 1998). While exploring the phenomenology of change experienced by teachers in an AISI improvement project I also addressed my own experiences of change and the tensions that existed in my personal and professional narrative.

As a researcher I experienced the challenge to respond to the questions posed by individual teachers as they struggled to develop an understanding of AISI, their project and possibilities associated with AISI. This challenge forced me to review my own professional practice and role regarding AISI in my own school division. Many of the issues I experienced as a beginning teacher have continued to exist in spite of efforts to create coherence and shared understanding. I began to question if change could ever occur in a planned systematic fashion or if it only existed as a messy process in spite of what many have come to know about the change process and school improvement.

To that end, I have situated myself differently within the context of the AISI project I am involved with. I have taken more time to ensure that our principals, vice principals and project leaders have an understanding of AISI from a historical and practical perspective. While caution was advised for spending funds, it has been replaced with an emphatic recommendation that more teaches and school administrators attend the annual AISI conference. I have characterized the attendance at the annual AISI conference as the opportunity for teachers and administrators to see first hand the experiences of teachers as positive change agents making a difference in the lives of their students.

I have also reflected on my own tension between the urgency to provide solutions in a timely fashion to taking the time to understand the problem deeper. To some extent it appears that school improvement efforts seem engaged more in tinkering on the fringes of the real issues rather than digging deeper to determine the nature of the real problem. The focus on discussions that create shared meaning, lead to deeper understandings, and result in meaningful change, appear to have been overlooked. Carson (1986) argues for the need to have "real conversations" in order to "draw forth thoughts and ideas not hitherto present" (p. 81). These conversations address the "negativity of experience", those things that are not as we had assumed them to be, and critically "begin with an attempt to understand the question itself" (Carson, 1986, p. 81). What appears to be lacking in the lives of the participants in the case study and in my own school division is the time and commitment to understand the question. Instead there appears to be a rush to find solutions in the name of school improvement with a temporary relief from the pressures and feelings

of urgency to address the problem. In some conversations I have been told "We don't want to know and don't have time to have the discussions. Just tell us. You are the leader." As Stoll and Fink (1996) have found in their study, change is required in order to maintain pace with the changing world around us. For some, there appears to be no time to dialogue or collaborate given the various roles, activities and responsibilities in their personal and professional lives. While the provision of release time using AISI funds appears to create time to dialogue and collaborate, it continues to be a double edged sword in that teachers must still prepare lessons for their students.

The current and ongoing challenge is to create opportunities within our learning community to dialogue, identify the questions and begin to understand them. While teachers were the focus of the study, our school administrators, central office staff and board members also experience their phenomenology of change. Where and how do opportunities for real conversations occur in these contexts?

I also strive for the learning community that Jill and Bev imagined where opportunities exist to hold open dialogues to address the important questions without fear of repercussion. The development of a learning community appears to be a requisite outcome for developing meaningful and lasting change. Creating that community is contingent upon the acceptance of the individual personal and professional narratives that each teacher presents and the trust and openness to share and welcome others into our discussion. Developing sufficient trust and openness within the broader educational community and individual school communities

continues to be a challenge where the balance between pressure and support varies between individuals and continues to be negotiated.

Afterward

Throughout my career I have been excited about learning. There is no greater satisfaction than seeing the sense of accomplishment in the eyes and face of a student when he or she have learned something new. For many educators, this is by far a greater reward than any recognition publicly or monetarily.

Early on in my career I recognized that furthering my own professional learning could be best achieved by furthering that of others through organizing professional development activities. With this also came a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when staff members came away from these activities inspired and motivated.

As I have pursued my career and studies, learning and professional development have been a central piece in all that I have done. With the announcement of AISI and its significant focus on professional development for teachers I was attracted to the learning possibilities for our teachers and in turn for our students.

Given the three year project focus of AISI and focus on professional development, studying the AISI project, and in particular the experiences of teachers engaged in the project seemed and felt like a natural fit. I was living my own AISI experience and would have the opportunity to learn more about it by studying another. Given my role at work and Doctoral studies, I could not have asked for a more meaningful context to guide my reading, studying and reflections.

There are a number of implications in my thesis and I would like to speak to them in general terms. The implementation of AISI had profound implications for

teachers engaged in AISI projects. Teachers within the study have demonstrated changing levels of engagement influenced by their own individual personal and professional narratives that exist with a complex school and community environment. Their lives as members of the broader community and socio-political environment, lives as family members, and members of a school staff are intricately entwined as a living entity. Attitudes, perceptions, energy levels and ability to commit time and energy were all affected by the various roles that teachers experienced on a daily basis.

The professional development opportunities provided with AISI funds have served as a significant catalyst for teachers. It has influenced morale, learning, and it has also developed the teacher as a critical consumer of professional development opportunities. International professional development opportunities, quality speakers, and quality learning experiences have become the expected norm. It is evident with teachers in the study that given time is a valuable resource, quality learning experiences are absolutely essential. These quality experiences have opened the door for teachers to become part of the larger conversations regarding education and have also provided access to the leading authors and practitioners. They have affirmed existing practices and begun to develop shared understandings among colleagues within their school, province and international educational community.

Of all the professional development activities, attendance at the Annual AISI conference has had the most profound effect upon teachers. It has been described by participants in the study as "electric" and creating a level of energy not seen before in schools. Having the opportunity to see other teachers making a difference has

rekindled the energy levels for teachers and opened doors to possibilities of what could be for students and teachers. Jill's comment in the study, "We can do that" is similar to the responses witnessed by our staff. Staff and schools have begun to recognize and embrace the possibilities and become actively engaged in learning, action research and more recently, have been presenting their accomplishments for their peers at the school and provincial levels.

These professional development opportunities for learning and presenting have also nurtured a sense of empowerment for teachers and schools. Instead of "managing" schools and student and teacher learning, schools have taken on a greater leadership role in determining their own needs based on their student and staff learning needs.

While teachers have had opportunities to examine various AISI projects from across the province, they have also reflected upon their own situations. Within the study this has caused teachers to reflect on their learning communities, their own practices and the expectations that have begun to emerge as a result. For teachers in the study it appears that involvement in the AISI project has begun to influence teacher practice as well as the culture of their school. Teachers in the study sought to create an open environment where real conversations could be held and staff members could dialogue about issues without fear of repercussions.

One cannot but wonder how the notion of a learning community as proposed by teachers in the study will evolve in their school building and if it will begin to extend beyond into the broader community? Will it work in other schools and can it

be realized and supported by the current leadership in the various schools and divisions?

School divisions have now come to cautiously expect that AISI funding, currently in its sixth year, will continue. Staffing levels, new projects and sustainability issues are among the topics at our executive team level as we look into the future not knowing if AISI will continue and the challenges we will be left with should it not. A host of questions will likely be asked by Central Elementary School? Will we be able to sustain the initiatives made possible with AISI funding? Will teacher attitudes towards Alberta Education be affected negatively if funding is discontinued? Are existing infrastructures created to support AISI projects at risk of being discontinued? If so, what impacts will this have on staffing?

As a system we have also considered the impacts should AISI discontinue. Our staff has developed an appetite for quality and quantity professional development. Will we be able to sustain the same level and quality of staff development that we have come to know under AISI? Are there alternate strategies such as pooling resources between schools? How will teachers perceive the withdrawal of funding and will it be perceived negatively and result in cynicism within the teacher community?

AISI has served as a catalyst by providing financial resources, physical resources and critically, time for teachers to become engaged more actively and meaningfully to initiate school improvement initiatives for students and staff. I believe that my study is critical in that it provides insight into the experiences of teachers as they have engaged in this process and provides a sense of the experiences

they have had in this journey. While the study's purpose was to examine the experiences of teachers, their comments reflect a complex environment internally and externally, personally and professionally that is negotiated at a very personal level.

References

Alberta (1999) Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Education Partner Working Group. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement: Administrative Handbook. Edmonton. (http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/sib/aisi).

Alberta (2000). Alberta Initiative for School Improvement: Opportunities and Challenges. "Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Edmonton, Alberta, May 24, 2000". Edmonton. (http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/sib/aisi).

Alberta Government. (1999a). *The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Education Partners Steering Committee Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.* Edmonton. (http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/sib/aisi).

Alberta Government. (1999b) *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Education Partner Working Group. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement: Administrative Handbook.* Edmonton: (http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/sib/aisi).

Alberta. (1999). The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Education Partners Steering Committee Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. Edmonton. (http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/sib/aisi).

Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving Schools From Within.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Beck, Clive. (1997). *Postmodernism, Pedagogy, and Philosophy of Education.* http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/COE/EPS/PES-yearbook/93_docs/BECK.HTM.

Berman, P, & McLaughlin, N. (1976, March). Implementation of Educational Innovation. The Educational Forum, p. 345 – 370.

Boostrom, Robert. (1994). Learning to pay attention. *Qualitative Studies in Education.* 7(1) p. 51 - 64 .

Bryk, A., Sebring, P., Kerbow, D., Rollow, S., & Easton, J. (1998). *Charting Chicago School Reform.* Boulder, CO.: Westview Press.

Carson, T. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of doing research. Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 4(2), p. 73 – 85

Clinchy, B. M. (1995). Goals 2000: The Students As Object. *Phi Delta Kappan* 76, 5:383, pp. 389 – 392.

Cresswell, John W. (1994). *Research Design Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*. London: Sage Publications.

Cuban, L. (1982). Persistent Instruction: the high school classroom, 1900 – 1980. *Phi Delta Kappan*, October p. 113 – 118.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1), p. 1 – 32.

Denzin, Norman and Lincoln Yvonna (1994) Entering the Field of Qualitative Research, Handbook of Qualitative Research, *Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonna (Ed.) London: Sage Publications.*

Earl, L, & Lee, L. (1998). *Evaluation of The Manitoba School Improvement Program*, Online: www.sunvalley.ca/msip/3/evaluation.

Ellis, J. (1998). *Teaching From Understanding: Teacher as Interpretive Inquirer*. New York: Garland.

Evans, R. (1996). *The Human Side of School Change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Fink, D. (2004). *Leadership for Mortals*. London. Sage Publications. (Unpublished at time of NSDC Conference, Vancouver, CA. Dec. 4-8, 2004)

Fritz, Robert (2000) Teaching Structural Tension. *Schools That Learn. A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education*. Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J. and Kleiner, A. New York: Doubleday.

Fritz, Robert. (1999a) *The Path of Least Resistance.* Williston,VT: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Fritz, Robert. (1999b) *The Structure of Change.* http://www.robertfritz.com/writingshealth.htm .

Fullan, Michael (1982). *The Meaning of Educational Change*. Toronto: OISE Press.

Fullan, Michael (1992). *Successful School Improvement*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Fullan, Michael. (1993). *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform.* London: Falmer Press.

Fullan, Michael (1999). *Change Forces: The Sequel*. Philadelphis: Falmer Press.

Fullan, Michael (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing Ltd.

Fullan, Michael & Hargreaves, Andy (1996). *What's Worth Fighting For in Your School*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, Michael, with Stiegelbauer, S. (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gadamer, H. (1975). *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury.

Gadamer, H. (2002). *Truth and Method, Second Revised Edition*, New York: Continuum

Gaskell, J. (1995). Secondary Schools in Canada: The National Report of the Exemplary Schools Project. Toronto: The Canadian Education Association.

Glickman, C. D. (1993). *Renewing America's Schools*. San Francisco. CA: Jossey-Bass.

Goerner, S. (1998). *Web World and The Turning of Times*. Unpublished manuscript.

Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1998). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Guskey, T.R. (1986). Staff development and the process of teacher change. Educational Researcher 15 (5), pp. 5 – 12.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teacher's Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*. London: Cassell

Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the Knowledge Society*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harris, Alma. (1999). *Teaching and Learning in the Effective School*. London: Arena Press.

Hopkins, D., Ainscow, M. and West, M. (1994). *School Improvement in an Era of Change*. London: Cassell.

Hopkins, D., Ainscow, M., & West, M. (1993). Making Sense of School Improvement: An Interim Account of The "Improving the Quality of Education" Project. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Nov93, Vol. 23, Issue 3, pp.287 – 305.

Huberman, M. (1983). Recipes for Busy Kitchens. Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization, 4, p. 478 – 510.

Jacka, Noreen (1999). What Makes a Good School? In CERIS Theme – *Exemplary Schools and Best Practices.* http://ceris.schoolnet.ca/e/GoodSchool2.html.

Joyce, D. (1991). The Doors to School Improvement. *Educational Leadership*, 48(8), 59 – 62.

Lezotte, L. W. & Jacoby, B. C. (1990). *The School Improvement Process Based on Effective Schools Research: A Guide.* (report No. ISBN-1-883247-00-4). Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Institute for Educational Management. (ERIC Reproduction Service No. Ed 360 680).

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Beverley Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Little, J. W. (1981). The Power of Organizational Setting. Paper adapted from final report, *School Success and Staff Development.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Education.

Louis, K. S., Lagerweij, N., & Voogt, J. E. (1994). School Improvement. In T. Husen & T. N. Postlethwaite (Eds), *International Encyclopedia of Education*: Vol. 9(2nd ed., pp. 5241-5247). New York: Pergamon.

Lyotard, J.-_F. (1986). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marris, P. (1975) *Loss and Change.* New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Marris, P. (1986). *Loss and Change.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

McEwen, N. and Sakyi, A. (2001). *AISI Project Annual Report (APAR).* Edmonton: School Improvement Branch (unpublished document).

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mertins, Donna M. (1998). *Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches.* London: Sage Publications.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook (2nd Ed.).* Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage.

Miles, Matthew. (1964) *Innovation in Education.* New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Miles, Matthew. (1993). Forty Years Of Change In Schools: Some Personal Reflections. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, (29), p. 213-248.

Mitchell, C and Sackney, L. (2000). *Profound Improvement – Building Capacity for A Learning Community.* Swets and Zeitlinger: Exton(PA).

Mitchell, C., Sackney, L. and Walker, K. (1996) The Postmodern Phenomenon: Implications for School organization and Educational Leadership. *The Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations* Vol. 11 (1) (pp. 39 – 67).

Naylor, Charlie (2001). *Teacher workload and stress: An international perspective on human costs and systemic failure.* BCTF Research Report. www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001cls01

Neufeldt, V & Gurlanik, D. (Eds.) (1988). *Webster's New World Dictionary of American English.* New York : Webster's New World Dictionaries.

Newmann, F., & Wehlage, G. (1995). *Successful School Restructuring.* Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Packer, M. & Goicoechea, J. (2000). Sociocultural and Constructivist Theories of Learning: Ontology, Not Just Epistemology. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(4) p. 227 – 241.

Parsons, J. (2001). *University Roles: How Can Schools and Universities Work Well Together?* Conference Presentation at Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Annual Provincial AISI Conference, Nov. 1-2, 2001: Edmonton.

Patton, M. Q. (1980). *Qualitative Evaluation Methods.* Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Peshkin, Alan. (2000). The Nature of Interpretation in Qualitative Research. *Educational Researcher.* Dec. p. 5 – 9.

Popkewiwtz, T. S., Tabachnik, B.R., & Wehlage, G.G. (1982). *The Myth of Educational Change.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Proudfoot, C., & Baker, R. (1994). Looking at School Improvement From a Contextual Perspective. *School Organization*, 14(1). 21 – 36.

Renihan, P. J., & Renihan, F. I. (1994). Institutionalizing School Improvement: A Recipe for Success. *NASSP Bulletin*, 78(559). 84 – 92.

Reynolds, D. (1993). Changing School Improvement Strategies for the 1990s. (Report No. EQ 025 289). *Norrkoping, SN: International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 362 948).

Richardson, G. H. (2002). *The Death of the Good Canadian*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Rosenholtz, (1989). *Teachers' Workplace: The Social Organization of Schools*. New York: Longman.

Schon, D. (1971). *Beyond the Stable State.* New York: Norton.

Schwandt, T.R. (1990). Paths to inquiry in the social disciplines. In E. Guba (Ed.), *The Paradigm Dialogue.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Senge, P.(Ed.) (2000). *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Handbook for Educators, Parents and Everyone Who Cares About Education*. New York: Doubleday

Sergiovanni, Thomas. (1996). *Leadership for The Schoolhouse*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Skytt, J. (2001). *Action Research.* Conference Presentation at Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Annual Provincial AISI Conference, Nov. 1-2, 2001: Edmonton.

Slattery, Patrick. (1995). *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*. New York: Garland Publishing.

Smith, David Geoffrey, (1999). *Pedagon*. New York: Peter Lang.

Smith, J. (1990). Alternative Research Paradigms and The Problem of Criteria. In E. Guba (Ed.), *The Paradigm Dialogue*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Smith, J. (1993). Hermeneutics and Qualitative Inquiry. In D. J. Flanders & G.E. Mills 9Eds.), *Theory and Concepts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives From The Field*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sparks, D. & Hirsch, S. (1997). *A New Vision for Staff Development*. Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council.

Stoll, L. and Fink, D. (1996) *Changing our Schools: Linking School Effectiveness and School Improvement.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Townsend, D. (2001). *Action Research.* Conference Presentation at Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Annual Provincial AISI Conference, Nov. 1-2, 2001: Edmonton.

Van Velzen, W., Miles, M., Ekholm, M., Hameyer, U., & Robin, D. (1985). *Making School Improvement Work.* Leuven, BM: ACCO.

Wellman, B. and Lipton, L. (2004). *Date-Driven Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide to Collaborative Inquiry.* Sherman, CT: MiraVia

Wendel, Terrence. (2000). *Creating Equity and Quality. Schools That Make a Difference,* SAEE Research Series #6.

Wendell, Terrence. (2001). *AISI: Making A Difference for Alberta Students.* Unpublished Document.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and Methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.